PARTISAN REVIEW

A LITERARY MONTHLY

VOLUME IV, No. 3 FEBRUARY, 1938

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Editors: F. W. DUPEE, DWIGHT MACDONALD, MARY McCARTHY, GEORGE L. K. MORRIS, WILLIAM PHILLIPS, PHILIP RAHV.

Business Manager: NANCY MACDONALD

PARTISAN REVIEW *is published monthly at 22 East 17 Street, New York, N. Y. Subscriptions* $2.50 *yearly; foreign rate* $3.00; *Canada,* $2.75. *Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright January,* 1938 *by* PARTISAN REVIEW. *Entered as second-class matter, November* 12, 1937, *at the post office at New York, N. Y. under the Act of March* 3, 1879.

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CONTRIBUTORS

EDMUND WILSON is the author of *Axel's Castle, I Thought of Daisy, Travels in Two Democracies,* and other volumes. . . . JAMES AGEE'S *Permit Me Voyage* was published in the Yale Series of Younger Poets. He has contributed to *The New Masses, Fortune,* and other magazines. . . . IGNAZIO SILONE, who lives in Switzerland, is writing a sequel to his novel, *Bread and Wine.* . . . WALLACE STEVENS recently published a new book of poetry, *The Man With the Blue Guitar.* . . . PARKER TYLER edited an anthology of modernistic poetry, *Modern Things,* and is the author of two pamphlets of verse. . . . BYRON A. VAZAKAS was born in New York City, lives now in Reading, Pa. His poems have appeared in *Smoke* and *The American Poetry Journal.* . . . WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT is the author of *Biography for Traman,* a volume of verse published last year. He writes us that his poem, *Those Autobiographical Blues,* is about Haverhill, Massachusetts. . . . JOHN WHEELWRIGHT is the author of *Rock and Shell,* a book of poems, and editor of *Vanguard Verse.* He lives in Boston. . . . KENNETH PATCHEN, whose volume of verse, *Before the Brave,* was published by Random House, lives in California. His poem in this issue is from a sequence called *The Executions in Moscow.* . . . HARRY ROSKOLENKO has contributed to *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, The New American Caravan,* and *Scribners.* He lives in New York City. . . . LIONEL ABEL, whose work has appeared in *The Nation, New Letters in America,* is now working on a translation of Rimbaud. . . . DELMORE SCHWARTZ has contributed poetry and fiction to earlier issues of PARTISAN REVIEW. . . . BALCOMB GREENE lives in New York City; he is a member of the American Abstract Artists group. . . . ROSE M. STEIN has published in *The Nation* and other periodicals. Her book, *M-Day,* came out last year. She is now writing a book on the recent strikes in the steel industry. . . . R. P. BLACKMUR has written verse and criticism for many periodicals. He is the author of *The Double Agent,* a book of criticism. . . . F. O. MATTHIESSEN is a member of the faculty of Harvard University. His most recent book was *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot.*

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THE LAST PHASE OF HENRY JAMES*

Edmund Wilson

In 1904, for the first time in twenty years, Henry James revisited America. The chief results of his trip were *The American Scene* and a novel, *The Ivory Tower,* left unfinished at his death. In his late novels written before his return it has always been the American characters who have gotten the better of it from the moral point of view—scoring heavily off a fascinating Italian prince, an equally fascinating French lady and a formidable group of middle-class English people. Yes: there *was* a beauty and there was also a power in the goodness of these naive and open people, which had not existed for Flaubert and his group. It *is* something different and new which does not fit into the formulas of Europe. What if Lambert Strether *had* missed in Woollett, Mass., many things that he would have enjoyed in Paris: he had brought to Paris something it did not have. And the burden of the book on *William Wetmore Story and His Friends,* which was also written during this time—rather different from that of his early book on Hawthorne—is that American artists might much better stay at home.

In his other unfinished novel, the fantasia called *The Sense of the Past,* he makes a young contemporary American go back into eighteenth-century England. Here the Jamesian ambiguity serves an admirable artistic purpose. Is it the English of the past who are the ghosts or is it the American himself who is a dream?—will the moment come when *they* will vanish or will he himself cease to exist? And, as before, there is a question of James's own asking at the bottom of the ambiguity Which is real—America or Europe? It was, however, in the novel, the American who was to remain real. (It is curious to compare *The Sense of the Past* with *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* with which it really has a good deal in common.)

For, in spite of the popular assumption founded on his expatriation, it is the American who finally dominates in Henry James.

And his warmest tributes to American genius come out of these later years. Though he could not, in *Notes of a Son and Brother,*

* From a longer study of Henry James.

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resist the impulse to remove references to Lincoln as "old Abe" from William James's early letters of the war-time, it contains pages on Lincoln's death of a touching appreciation and pride. "It was vain to say," he writes of Andrew Johnson, of whom he says that the American people felt him unworthy to represent them, "that we had deliberately invoked the 'common' in authority and must drink the brine we had drawn. No countenance, no salience of aspect nor composed symbol, could superficially have referred itself less than Lincoln's mold-smashing mask to any mere matter-of-course type of propriety; but his admirable unrelated head had itself revealed a type—as if by the very fact that what made in it for roughness of kind looked out only less than what made in it for splendid final stamp; in other words for commanding Style." And of the day when the news reached Boston: "I was fairly to go in shame of its being my birthday. These would have been the hours of the streets if none others had been—when the huge general gasp filled them like a great earth-shudder and people's eyes met people's eyes without the vulgarity of speech. Even this was, all so strangely, part of the lift and the swell, as tragedy has but to be of a pure enough strain and a high enough connection to sow with its dark hand the seed of greater life. The collective sense of what had occurred was of a sadness too noble not somehow to inspire, and it was truly in the air that, whatever we had as a nation produced or failed to produce, we could at least gather round this perfection of classic woe."

In *The American Scene,* he writes of Concord: "We may smile a little as we 'drag in' Weimar, but I confess myself, for my part, much more satisfied than not by our happy equivalent, 'in American money,' for Goethe and Schiller. The money is a potful in the second case as in the first, and if Goethe, in the one, represents the gold and Schiller the silver, I find (and quite putting aside any bimetallic prejudice) the same good relation in the other between Emerson and Thoreau. I open Emerson for the same benefit for which I open Goethe, the sense of moving in large intellectual space and that of the gush, here and there, out of the rock, of the crystalline cupful, in wisdom and poetry, in *Wahrheit* and *Dichtung;* and whatever I open Thoreau for (I needn't take space here for the good reasons) I open him oftener than I open Schiller." Edith Wharton says that he used to read Walt Whitman aloud "in a mood of subdued ecstasy" and with tremendous effect on his hearers.

Henry James's career had been affected by the shift in the national point of view which occurred after the Civil War. It is being shown by Mr. Van Wyck Brooks in his cultural history of New England how the Bostonian of the first part of the century was inspired—

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as, in our time, the Russians have been—to present the world with a new humanity, set free from the caste-barriers and poverties of Europe, which should return to the mother-country only to plunder her for elements of culture which might contribute to the movement at home; and how, with the triumph of the industrial system, the persons who were occupied with art and thought became gradually ashamed of the United States and tended to take refuge in Europe. Henry James belonged to this second phase, but he had a good deal of the idealism of the first one. It appears in the name of the hero of *The American*: Newman, and in his phrase about Lincoln's "mold-smashing mask"; and, after a period of partial abeyance, when he had been writing largely about Europeans, it cropped up again, as I have shown, and took the field.

But Henry James is a reporter, not a prophet. With less political philosophy even than Flaubert, he can only chronicle the world as it passes, and in his picture the elements are mixed. In the Americans of Henry James's later novels—the Milly Theales, the Lambert Strethers, the Maggie Ververs, as well as the Newmans and the Isabel Archers—he shows us all that was magnanimous, reviving and human in the Americans at the beginning of the new century along with all that was frustrated, sterile, excessively refined, depressing—all that they had in common with the Frédéric Moreaus and with the daughters of poor English parsons. There they are with their ideals and their blights. Milly Theale, for example—quite real at the core of the cloudy integument with which James has swathed her about—is one of the best portraits of a rich New Yorker in fiction. It is the great period of the heyday of Sargent; but compare these figures of Henry James's with Sargent's and see with what profounder insight as well as with what superior delicacy James has caught the rich Americans of this race.

And between the first and the second blooming something tragic has happened to these Americans. What has become of Christopher Newman? He is Lambert Strether now: he has been worn down by the factories of Woollett. And these Americans of the later novels, who still bring Europe the American sincerity—what has happened to them to make them so wan? Well, for one thing, they have become very rich, and being rich is a terrible burden: in the process of getting rich, they have starved themselves spiritually at home; and now that they are trying to get something for their money, they find that they have put themselves at the mercy of all the schemers and adventurers of Europe. It seems to me foolish to reproach Henry James for having neglected the industrial background. Like sex, we never get very close to it, but its effects are a part of his picture. James's tone is more

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often old-maidish than his sense of reality is feeble; and the whole development of American society during his absence is implied in these later books.

Now when he returns—late in the day though it is for him—he reacts strongly and describes vividly what he finds.

The returning New Yorker of *The Jolly Corner* encounters the apparition of himself as he would have been if he had stayed in America: "Rigid and conscious, spectral yet human, a man of his own substance and stature waited there to measure himself with his power to dismay." At first the apparition covers its face with its hands; then it advances upon the returned native "as for aggression, and he knew himself give ground. Then harder pressed still, sick with the force of his shock, and falling back as under the hot breath and the sensed passion of a life larger than his own, a rage of personality before which his own collapsed, he felt the whole vision turn to darkness," and he fainted.

But at contact with the harsh new America, the old Balzac in James revives. I do not know why more has not been made by James's critics—especially by the critics of the left, who are so certain that there is nothing in him—of his unfinished novel, *The Ivory Tower*. The work of his all but final period has been "poetic" rather than "realistic"; but now he passes into still a further phase, in which the poetic treatment is applied to what is for James a new kind of realism. The fiction of his latest period is preoccupied in a curious way with the ugly, the poor and the old, even with—what is unprecedented for James—the grotesque. It is perhaps the reflection of his own old age, his own lack of worldly success, the strange creature that he himself has become. This new vein begins, I think, with *The Papers*, with its fantastically amusing picture of the sordid lives of journalists in London. *Fordham Castle*, in which he said he had attempted to do some justice to the parents of the Daisy Millers, whose children had left them behind, is an excursion into the America of Sinclair Lewis. *The Bench of Desolation*—one of the most beautifully written and wonderfully developed pieces in the whole range of Henry James's work, and, I believe, the last piece of fiction he published—is a sort of poem of loneliness and poverty among the nondescript small shopkeepers and former governesses of an English seaside resort.

And now the revelation of Newport, as it presented itself in the nineteen hundreds—so different from the Newport which he had described years ago in *An International Episode*—stimulates him to something quite new: a kind of nightmare of the American new rich. Here his gusto for the varied forms of life, his interest in social phenomena for their own sake, seems suddenly to wake up from its

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reveries. The actual appearances of things become suddenly vivid again. In the novels which preceded *The Ivory Tower,* the carefully selected and charming old-world settings had been steadily fading out; but now, to our amazement, there starts into relief the America of the millionaires, at its crudest, corruptest and phoniest: the immense summer mansions full of equipment which no one ever seems to have selected or used, the old men of the Rockefeller-Frick generation, landed, with no tastes and no interests, amidst an unlimited magnificence which dwarfs them, the silly or clumsy young people of the second generation with their off-color relationships, their enormous meaningless parties, their touching longings and resolute strivings for an elegance and cultivation they cannot manage. The apparition in *The Jolly Corner* came upon the Europeanized American "quite as one of those expanding fantastic images projected by the magic lantern of childhood"; and in the same way, for the reader of James, with the opening of *The Ivory Tower,* there emerges the picture of old Abner Gaw sitting and rocking his foot and looking out on the sparkling Atlantic while he waits for his partner to die.

The Ivory Tower is immensely comic, deeply human and brilliantly observed—and it is poetic in the highest sense, like all these later novels: in the sense that its characters and images, individualized though they are, shine out with the incandescence which shows them as symbols of phases through which the human soul has passed.

The moral of the book—which seems quite plain from the scenario left by James—is also of particular interest. The ivory tower itself, a fine piece of Chinese carving, figures the spiritual isolation, the cultivation of sensations and the literary activity which are to be made possible for the young American, returned from Europe, who has inherited his uncle's fortune; but it contains, also, the fatal letter in which the vindictive Mr. Gaw has revealed all the swindles and perfidies by which the fortune has been created. So that the young man (he has always had a *little* money) is to come finally to be glad enough to give up the ivory tower with the fortune.

James dropped *The Ivory Tower* when the War broke out in 1914, because it seemed to him too remote from the present. The War seems to have presented itself to him as simply a struggle between, on the one hand, French and English civilization and, on the other, German barbarism. He had believed in, and had been writing rather vaguely about, the possible salutary effect on human affairs of a sort of international élite such as he tended to depict in his novels; and now he spoke of the past as "the age of the mistake," the time when people had thought that things would be all right. He now became violently nationalistic, or at least violently pro-Ally, and took

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out citizen's papers in England, because America had not yet gone into the War. It never seems to have occurred to him that in *The Ivory Tower* he had been much closer to contemporary realities than in becoming an English citizen, that the partnership of Betterman and Gaw was a European phenomenon, too—any more than it ever occurred to him that the class antagonisms of *The Princess Casamassima* —his response to the depression of the eighties—must inevitably appear again. But as Hyacinth Robinson died of the class struggle, so Henry James died of the War.

DIXIE DOODLE

In the region of the Tee Vee Aye,
Of the cedars and the sick red clay,
We've discovered a solution
Neither hearstian nor rooshian
In the embers of a burnt-out day.

When the world swings back to sense
(But the world is *so* damned dense)
An indisputably aryan
Jeffersonian Agrarian
Will be settn awn the Ole Rail Fence,

Swaying lightly with a hot cawn bun,
Quoting Horace and the late Jawn Donne,
He will keep the annual figgers
Safe away from the eyes of niggers,
And back his Culture up with whip and gun:

And in every single solitary region
We'll each frame our millenium
In a native-hewn proscenium
Unbedunged by any nonindigenous pigeon.

JAMES AGEE

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A CHILDHOOD MEMORY

Ignazio Silone

I RETAIN with surprising clarity many memories of the time when I was barely three or four years old. But my earliest memory of all is an isolated one, and even if it leaves my friends incredulous, I have not the slightest doubt of its authenticity. It takes me back to the distant day when I was weaned. I deduce from local custom in force at the time that I must have been between eighteen months and two years old. I must first explain that in the part of the world from which I come a rather underhand though very ancient and certainly very effective stratagem is resorted to cause a baby voluntarily to accept other food after the long period in which its sole nourishment has been its mother's milk. When a mother believes the time for weaning has come, without warning the child in any way, she makes big black smudges on her breasts with charcoal or some other colouring matter; and when the child wants to be fed she offers it the breast as usual, as though the occasion were perfectly normal. The child is astonished and horrified at the sight of the smudges, and the way in which it reacts varies "according to its temperament." Some children burst out crying and wait for the smudges to disappear; some think it over, shut their eyes and suck, in terror; some try to suck, but the sight of the horrible smudges repels them. The final result, however, is always the same; the child abandons the breast and accepts other nourishment. I distinctly remember that this cruel trick succeded at once with me. I well remember that a friend of my mother's was sitting with her that day. My mother was sad and silent, as later she always was when she had to do things of which she inwardly disapproved, but that were required of her by tradition. Her friend, however, looked at me and laughed. I remember the mixture of terror and disgust with which I discovered the mysterious marks on the maternal breasts. It was the first tragic moment of my life. I had to part for ever from those two dear, soft, round, intimate, dependable sweet things from which I had hitherto extracted my nourishment in a marvellous and easy manner.

Three years later the same thing happened to my brother, this

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time with me as spectator. My brother wept and screamed. My mother remained silent and impassive this time too. Then she asked me if I remembered the effect it had had on me three years before, and she was very surprised to learn that I remembered it all distinctly and that I still could not understand how she, who was always so kind and affectionate to me, could have brought herself to deceive me like that.

"But I had to start feeding you on other things!" she tried to explain.

"Did you really have to?" I objected.

"Did you really have to?"

(*Translated from the Italian by Eric Mosbacher*)

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A LITTLE ANTHOLOGY

TWO POEMS

Loneliness in Jersey City

The deer and the dachshund are one.
Well, the gods grow out of the weather.
The people grow out of the weather;
The gods grow out of the people.
Encore, encore, encore les dieux . . .

The distance between the dark steeple
And cobble ten thousand and three
Is more than a seven-foot inchworm
Could measure by moonlight in June.

Kiss, cats: for the deer and the dachshund
Are one. My window is twenty-nine three
And plenty of window for me.
The steeples are empty and so are the people.

There's nothing whatever to see,
Except polacks that pass in their motors
And play concertinas all night.
They think that things are all right,
Since the deer and the dachshund are one.

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Anything Is Beautiful If You Say It Is

Under the eglantine
The fretful concubine
Said, "Phooey! Phoo!"
She whispered, "Pfui!"

The demi-monde
On the mezzanine
Said, "Phooey!" too,
And a "Hey-dee i-do!"

The bee may have all sweet
For his honey-hive-o,
From the eglantine-o,
So, so sang the concubine-o.

And the chandeliers are neat . . .
But their mignon, marblish glare!
We are cold, the parrots cried,
In a place so debonair.

The Johannisberger, Hans.
I love the metal grapes,
The rusty, battered shapes
Of the pears and of the cheese

And the window's lemon light,
The very will of the nerves,
The crack across the pane,
The dirt along the sill.

WALLACE STEVENS

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Testament from the Inheritors of the Waste Land

While we drop our consonants
The actor remembers and rehearses his lines
He remembers to remember the emphasis
We remember the emphasis
We forget to remember the rehearsal

The actor must remember the hour
Of the rehearsal, he must be
In an Eliot-hurry. We
Must not be in an Eliot-hurry.
We must remember our dignity.

Our dignity is not the actor's dignity
The saving of us from embarrassment
The triumph of the learned syllable
Echoing like a bell;
This is not the breath of our satisfaction
The uptake of our pleasure

We are dwellers in leisure.
Our word is Mallarmé's Swan
Undivided in feather and
Unrehearsed in movement
We do not remove our feathers
After the performance. We keep them.

We do not go to the Night Club
After the performance
In order to relax after our triumph
Or to listen to the rehearsals
Of our triumph. We do
Not go to the bar of drinking
Except to drink, nor go to the bar
Of thinking, except to think.

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The actor arrives at his pay-check
And the Elusive Thing called Fame
And he rehearses the fame every morning
That we rehearse the blame
We rehearse the blame yet we seize the lights
We rehearse the phosphene-spots, and
On the inside of the fallen lids
Of our expert-dreamer's eyes,
None is that hero that dies
In the violet spot.

There is something we do
That is called Nothing that the actor
Does not do. Something that within the Plot
Of time we do not plot. We are the unplotters
Unstringers. We grasp the scissors
From the palsied hand and we unscissor
And we deflower the dropped forgotten flower
That the stagehand fingers for a moment, then puts back.

There is nothing we have to say that
We do not lean over saying as
From a balcony, there is no balcony of words
We do not drop voice from as
From the murmurous one of Juliet
Sounding and unhinged from sound
Ah, honeysweet Romeo might be intercepted
By absence of that elocutionary sound

The night is a bouquet of a strange delay
And the day an instant of impetuous wait:
Cool and deliberate as a fan.
If we are monsters yet we have not masks
But naked stalk the naked idea love
If we do not love the way Time the actor loves
Under a sun of summer sumptuousness
We grow irrevocably, simply, tan.

We remember our inadequacy in our parts
Rather than our adequacy—
But we forget our inadequacy

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As we forget our adequacy
In straining over the footlights of
Our brows. We abhor the nights
As an actor loves his "post-mortems."
We abhor the sleepless nights
As an actor sleeps in the "post-mortems."

PARKER TYLER

Un Martyr

Quentin Massys

Hear now the elegant chimes
over the low crawling water
the negroes are sleeping
in the perched boat on the wave

The flowers unite
with furious odors
through the afternoon's
united song

How to gloss the word
of that feathery sky
and the feathery arrows
cluttering the monotonous void

Soon in a drop of blood
night may come
and animate the metal birds
to sing through longer evenings

BYRON A. VAZAKAS

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Those Autobiographical Blues

I think every day of the city where I was a boy—
I remember all of it, too: not only the river road
Flanked with autumnal color nor gold-leafed water
Nor the slow hills around, nor the smoke of thin spring—

That was after the war; money was easy, and everyone
Kept up his lawn in summer evenings and went
For a ride in the new car and was mostly young—even
The Armenian and Italian shoecutters got fur coats

And the Jews were buying up Main Street while the Yankees
Moved over a block or two, I remember; and the first to have
Radios—the Irish—bought big ones on installments.
The noise of things broken on the air began then

And in the daylight-saving we kids sat under neighbors' windows
To listen to the crackling notes of speech or jazz; and 'static', we said,
Sucking grass or wrestling, or watching the fireflies
Bewildered over the new cellar holes in the near fields.

I remember the bare bottoms of the kids I knew—
How they used to plunge and disappear and bounce up
Shining in the brown river in the afternoons, even until
The leaves were coming down brown and gold—O Christ, yes!

And that was not longer than ten—fifteen years ago
Before everything began to close up: the factories shut,
Houses unpainted along the frost-split streets and no
Macadam nor paint thought of, with clothes themselves junk;

Mr. Forrester shot himself at the Bank; Benny Goldstein
Lost his apartment houses; the store took back the Armenians'
Rugs and furniture; the Italians moved on with the shops; the
Irish got on relief, and the Yankees voted for Hoover.

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Full many an arse that smiled with mine—O, yes:
'Static—static—static': but all the while everywhere
Coming down the river and over the trees and up the steps and under
The evening grass, the no-sound of everything breaking in air.

WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT

The Word Is Deed

for Kenneth Burke

Before ever any Deed came
the sound of the last Deed coming
came with the coming Word
(which answers everything with dancing)
So *John* begins like *Genesis*:
Im Anfang war das Wort;
But Engels read there: *war die Tat.*

In the Beginning was the Word:
'Plant, tend, harvest our own food.'
This distinguished Men from Brutes.
(Men who dance know what was done.)
Good and Evil took roots
in this cause of Destinies
whence every Revolution stirred.

Ways of work determinate
moulds for men's intelligence.
Discoveries follow thence
obscured by fallibilities'
compensating philosophies
doubted soon as heard.
(Who dance not know not what is done.)

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But when, against Fate, errors ward:
"Frustrate while ye mirror kind
disaster, blind
Chance, at once your enemy and guard"
the muscles of the mind reply:
"Think, act in answer to desire;
from the will springs Promethean fire."

Deeds make us. May therefore when our Last
Judgment find our works be just;
all of our tools, from rulers to flutes
praise us; and our deeds' praise find
the Second Coming of the Word.
(Dance, all whose nature is to dance;
dance all, for all would pipe.)

JOHN WHEELWRIGHT

Poem

The poor thing crying at night,
Putting blunt head to our door
How the sky over these houses pushes itself
Against God's great agile hand

Hush, be still

In the village are lights and the voice
of a woman who knows your name

Hush, and sleep

"Who'd bread for dying?"
"Cheap candles for the dead?"

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And the heart puts a fence around heaven
As snow a privacy over the least sparrow fallen . . .

"Who'd bind the wound?"
"Cloth to cover terror!"

On this last hill strides that stranger and the voice which is not to be stilled

The door opens and it stands there, horribly,
As the hungry of heaven have always stood.

KENNETH PATCHEN

Aesthetics in Our Time

How emptily—
the white towers fall, the printed parchments
rot within their stalls; the wood
eaten to death by worms: the words
you use to-day are yesterday's cliché,
the dancer in the mirror's prance;
the poem, the phrase, the image
shattered by shock of falling glass and rock!

To invent and circumvent, to hollow—not hallow
in the briefer intensity of leaner language,—
not fattened in the mind's ornate theatre,
of imagination's clownish arabesque
for journalistic quest;
not dulled by season, plant and sky—
to wallow, as if the world primped and primed
its rhetoric—for subtler tricks:
the dancer has left the scene,
the audience remains with the broken mirrors,—
the lights smashed by a blind spectator. . . .

HARRY ROSKOLENKO

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Ode

A colored boy without
A textbook in the South
But with head bare as if
Always at school

Not at regular school
With truant officers
But another one
Open Sundays, too

Always ready for
An examining
In all the etiquettes
Of every melon breath

Here is another boy
In Poland, Germany,
It does not matter which
There is no sun indoors

Even his lips are pale
He keeps an old book warm
By rocking, intoning,
With his hat on

Until the difficult prose
Goes on among oranges,
Colors, characters
So warm they color him

O what friendly boys!
Sensual, studious,
Which was born for Talmud,
Which for Florida?

LIONEL ABEL

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Poem

Someone is harshly coughing on the next floor,
Sudden excitement catching the flesh of his throat:
Who is the sick one?
Who will knock at the door,
Ask what is wrong and sweetly pay attention,
The shy withdrawal of the sensitive face
Embarassing both, but double shame is tender
—We will mind our ignorant business, keep our place.

But it is God, who has caught cold again,
Wandering helplessly in the world once more,
Now he is phthisic, and he is, poor Keats,
(Pardon, O Father, unknowable Dear, this word,
Only the cartoon is lucid, only the curse is heard)
Longing for Eden, afraid of the coming war.

The past, a giant shadow like the twilight,
The moving street on which the autos slide,
The buildings' heights, like broken teeth,
Repeat necessity on every side,
The age requires death and is not denied,
—He's come as a young man, to hang once more!

Another mystery must be crucified,
Another exile bare his complex care,
Another spent head spill its wine, before
(When smoke in silence curves
from every fallen side)
Pity and Peace return, padding the broken floor
With heavy feet.
Their linen hands will hide
In the stupid opiate the exhausted war.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ

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TWO YEARS OF PROGRESS—FROM WALDO FRANK TO DONALD OGDEN STEWART

Philip Rahv

It is not for the sake of raking up old speeches that we have set out to examine the record* of the writers' congresses that met in New York in the spring of 1935 and of 1937. The congresses were run, of course, on the strict schedule imposed by their organizers, and to anyone not taken in by the art of political showmanship they may seem devoid of interest. But their importance lies in what they reveal about the history of the literary Left. Today revolutionary thinking in literature has virtually come to an end—at least so far as concerns those who once wrote and talked most about it. To consider the background of the two congresses, the amazing contrast between the first and the second, and the political mystifications employed by the party that staged them, will help us to understand how this has come about.

The Communist Party has captured an entire sector of literary opinion. This sector—of considerably less importance culturally than politically—it now exploits for its own peculiar ends. The phenomenon is new to this country, and as a factor in the literary situation it may not be ignored. In organizing gatherings of writers this party cleverly transforms its barrack ideology into the angelic diction of culture-yearning and humanist largesse. Its representatives are skilled in palming off administrative notions as principles of criticism and in suppressing intellectual freedom in the name of the defence of culture. There is, also, the emergence of the stooge as a leading character. In the mechanism of political seduction his function is that of a necessary lubricant.

Two Congresses: Two Policies

The Call to the first Congress was straightforward enough. "The capitalist system," read its opening paragraph, "crumbles so rapidly before our eyes that, whereas ten years ago scarcely more

* AMERICAN WRITERS' CONGRESS. *Edited by Henry Hart. New York: 1935. International Publishers.* $1.00.
THE WRITER IN A CHANGING WORLD. *Edited by Henry Hart. New York: 1937. Equinox Press.* $2.00.

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than a handful of writers were sufficiently far-sighted and courageous to take a stand for proletarian revolution, today hundreds . . . recognize the necessity of personally helping to accelerate the destruction of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' government." The suggested program for the permanent organization to be evolved at the Congress committed itself to "the fight against imperialist war and fascism, defence of the Soviet Union against capitalist aggression, the development and strengthening of the revolutionary labor movement, solidarity with colonial people in the struggle for freedom," and other equally militant ideas.

Now, it must be remembered that this first Congress was as much a congress "against war and fascism" as the second one. Yet no attempt was made to dissociate the fight against fascism from the fight against capitalism, and imperialist *fascist* wars from imperialist *democratic* wars. The class struggle was still being fought between two material entities called capital and labor, not two ideologies known as fascism and democracy. The focal discussions concerned themselves with the various forms of revolutionary writing and the writer's relation to Communism. In his speech Earl Browder declared that "the overwhelming number of writers who are producing living literature" were choosing sides on the basis of "the class struggle between capitalists and workers—the two basic forces in modern society. . . ." The other speakers were just as outspoken. "What are we here for? What do we believe in?" asked Edwin Seaver; and his reply was candid: "The fight against war and fascism? True enough. But this is largely a negative statement. Are we not here because we believe in forming a new and Communist ideology within the shell of the old and decaying capitalist society. . . ."

As to literature, the most flaming message came from Louis Aragon in Paris, who wrote to the Congress that "the literature of tomorrow has for its foundation the new humanity which rises from the proletarian revolution. . . . Above this living literature floats the red flag of the new materialism, of the Soviet literature of the whole world."

This was still in the blood-and-thunder style of blatant "leftism." Aragon's ultra-revolutionary rhetoric was only a grandiose French version of Granville Hicks, but the delirium of both had its identical source in the literal translation of sectarian and utopian party policies into the language of literary proclamations. These people have never learned to distinguish between the living world and the mechanized dreams of their party-apparatus.

The most amusing episode of the first Congress was provided by Kenneth Burke, who blandly suggested that Communist propagandists

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use the word "people" rather than the word "workers" as their "basic symbol of exhortation." At once several defenders of the Party Line leaped up to expose the perils involved in such a shift of verbal allegiance. Burke was overwhelmed with arguments. Is not the symbol of the *people* associated "with demagoguery of the most vicious sort?" Did not Hitler use it to deceive the masses? According to the German playwright, Friedrich Wolf, this symbol was "an essential part of the reformist approach" and resulted in the fascists taking power. Joseph Freeman, in those days as revolutionary as the next functionary, rose to instruct Burke in the elementary precepts of Marxism. He very sensibly said that the symbol of the *people* belonged to the epoch of the bourgeois revolution. "The word 'people,'" he continued, "then became a reactionary slogan—not because of the philosophy of myths, but because it concealed the reality, the actual living antagonism between the social classes. . . ." (Freeman, incidentally, was the only speaker in this debate who showed any understanding of what Burke was talking about. All the others attacked him as if he were attempting to revise the Marxist theory of the rôle of the working class in modern society, rather than suggesting a change in the *technique* of propaganda. An adequate reply would have analysed the relation of the verbal forms of propaganda to its intrinsic meanings. Instead Burke was declared a heretic and belabored with the big stick of the Party Line.)

But a few months later—in August, 1935, at the time of the 7th Congress of the Comintern, to be precise—Burke was completely vindicated. In fact, the Comintern vastly improved on Burke's "symbolic" suggestions. Now it was no longer a question of changing a key word of Communist propaganda but of throwing overboard the whole theory of scientific socialism. And the second Writers' Congress was accordingly saturated with the once dreaded symbolism of the *people*. Within the short space of two years the "revolutionaries" of 1935 had substituted the stars and stripes of New Deal Marxism for "the red flag of the new materialism."

In the Call to the 1937 Congress the capitalist system, that system which was so "rapidly crumbling before our eyes" in 1935, was no longer referred to. Neither was revolutionary writing mentioned. If the first Call summoned writers to the struggle against *imperialist* war and fascism, the second contented itself with a timorous meliorism designed not to offend well-paid scenario writers and ancient contributors to *The Saturday Evening Post*. In the past nothing short of the sovietization of "the literature of the whole world" would do; today the gates of the dialectic have been thrown wide open to any successful money writer.

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By the time of the second Congress the miracle had already been performed whereby culture had been released from its class moorings and transformed into a pure endowment of democracy. When the tiny opposition at the Congress asked some embarrassing questions concerning this matter, the answer was that it is improper to propagate the Marxist point of view at a united front gathering. But in reality there was no trace of a united front. The overwhelming majority of delegates were either Communists or sympathizers of Communism. The name of the united front was lent to a meeting conducted under the exclusive control of one political party.

Listening to the speeches one got the impression that the international class struggle, bag and baggage, had been exported to one country: Spain. And even there it was held strictly to account and told to behave itself—it was a duel between fascism and democracy and no more. Here in the United States all we had to do was to encourage trade unionism and defend what we already possess, namely, our bountiful bourgeois democracy. On these foundations we shall build a "great" American culture. Naturally, no one on the Left denies the need of defending the democratic rights of the masses. But to lead writers to abandon their revolutionary direction for the sake of defending the bourgeois democratic order—which Lenin called "a paradise for the rich and a snare and a trap and deception for the exploited, for the poor"—is nothing less than betrayal. The Stalinists have converted anti-fascism into the latest rationale for defending the status quo; and it was precisely the sharp dichotomy they have set up between capitalism and fascism that formed the political basis of the second Writers' Congress. In literature this can only mean the artificial revival of values that have been historically transcended and a thousand times deflated.

The ritual phrases of the People's Front were used at the second Congress purely as a means of emotional incitement. The Stalinist literary politicians follow the classic models of their chiefs, which is always to assume exactly what you have to prove. No analysis was offered of the People's Front either as a theoretical formulation or as an actual experience in several European countries. There were many dramatic descriptions of the heroism of the Spanish people, but no serious discussion of the fundamental politics of the Spanish situation as exemplified in the mutual relations of the social classes or the perspectives of the war. The danger of fascism is tremendous; it must be fought. Yes, *but how?* Their reply is always on tap: the People's Front, "the union of all progressive forces." Now the point is that the word "progressive" is like the word "beautiful." But the criteria of physical beauty are relatively simple; to

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estimate correctly the progressive or reactionary character of a social movement, however, is infinitely more difficult. When divorced from an evaluation of the real class interests involved, the concept of progress becomes a purely meretricious phrase. The Stalinists are now wholesale importers of Progress, that opium of the 19th century! Who is so base as to oppose Progress? Beasts, not men.

In 1935 Freeman shuddered at the word "people." Now he makes smooth speeches about "restoring control of the government to representatives of the people's organizations through a broad People's Front. It seeks to restore and raise the living standards of the people," etc., etc. His formulation of the hoary clichés of reformism is sleek and up-to-date. But how can the government, which never belonged to the people, be "restored" to them? Freeman, who has been educated in Marxism, knows very well that lasting social reforms are only the by-products of revolutionary struggle and cannot be attained by subjecting the working people to the middle class. In its very nature this class, grumbling at those above it but inevitably their dupe, is incapable of resolute and protracted resistance to big capital. In his speeches at the second Congress Freeman waved the bloody shirt of fascist terror to reduce the opposition to silence. His arguments, however, boil down to this: Either you become a bourgeois democrat or else the capitalists will really get sore and bring in fascism. This is the sum total of the wisdom of the People's Front.

The second Congress met "in the shadow of the coming world war." But it was not a congress against war. On the contrary, it was calculated to aid in mobilizing American intellectuals for the support of the imperialist government of the United States in a possible war against the fascist powers. At the first Congress Harry F. Ward, president of the League Against War and Fascism, said that "it is understood that we are dealing not with war in general, but with the war which the United States government, in common with the other great powers, is now so strenuously preparing. . . . It is manifest that the declaration of war will bring the attempt to fasten down the full tyranny of repressive fascism in those capitalist countries where a vestige of democratic procedure still survives." In 1937 all this was forgotten. Not one word was spoken in criticism of the huge military budgets piled up by our own government. The writers of America were enjoined to support one imperialist coalition against another. Literature was being coördinated with the propaganda for a new crusade to make the world safe for democracy.

Presidents Come and Presidents Go

The first Congress set up a permanent organization called the League of American Writers, and elected Waldo Frank its president.

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Frank was elected unanimously, amidst overwhelming applause, and his impassioned speech closing the sessions made a deeper impression on the delegates than anything else they had heard at the Congress. Expressing his faith in the new League, he concluded with the cry: "Everything remains to be said. Everything remains to be done. Let us get to work!" Two years later, however, he was unceremoniously replaced by Donald Ogden Stewart, a dark horse from Hollywood. Stewart was likewise elected unanimously, and the applause for him was equally overwhelming. What, in the meantime, had happened to Waldo Frank? Not only did he make no report to the Congress of the organization he ostensibly headed for two years, but he did not even participate in its proceedings. Frank had simply disappeared, and the only reference made to him was in the speech of Earl Browder, secretary of the Communist Party. Browder ridiculed Frank as a meddler in political matters. Thus the hero of yesterday, chosen to lead a political league of writers, was now denounced for daring to think he had anything to contribute to a political discussion. Behind it all, of course, was the fact that Frank had written an unorthodox letter to the *New Republic* about the Moscow trials. He had dared to speak out of turn and was excommunicated. The Stalinists, who manage and control the League of American Writers behind a facade of big-shot presidents and vice-presidents who seldom attend the meetings where the business of the League is really decided, have chosen well in elevating Mr. Stewart. As a stooge he will doubtless prove more pliant than Waldo Frank.

The program of the League of American Writers is supposedly restricted to the struggle against war and fascism. Officially it asks for no endorsement of the Stalin leadership in Russia. It claims to be a democratic, independent organization of writers free of party control. Yet in practice it will not tolerate the active participation of anyone who is not ready to defend every policy of Stalin. And in his speech to the second Congress, a congress convened to defend democracy, Browder, in the polite language and with all the paraphernalia appropriate to a cultural occasion, called for the denial of free speech and the democratic rights of public controversy to all literary and political opinion to the left of the Communist Party.

A Manufactured Renaissance

Have we dwelt too long on the political side of the second Congress? What about literature? Yes, but how can one take seriously an approach to writing wholly determined by the immediate political dividends it can be made to yield? Literature to these people is, after all, merely a pretext for the manipulation of ideas in favor of the

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current party policy. Writers were being exhorted to become political-minded; but in this setting political-mindedness means no more than unthinking adherence to Stalinism. There was an obscure paper by Kenneth Burke and indignant reports on the suppression of artistic freedom in the fascist countries; but literature in the Soviet Union was reported on purely quantitatively, as a feat of publishing and distributing "millions of books." The truth is that no genuine interest in writing could ever express itself at these gatherings organized under totalitarian auspices. The glib denunciations of every doubt, the smugness, the crawling before celebrities, the jargon of political uplift—what atmosphere could be more alien to creation, to individuality, to intellectual experience?

Nevertheless, some big pretensions were aired. The Call to the Congress opened with the statement: "Today in America there are signs of a literary revival that may resemble or surpass that of the period of 1912-1916." Freeman saw "every indication that American literature is about to enter a new period . . . the best writers are now armed with the knowledge and insight they formerly lacked." Malcolm Cowley declared that "American literature seems richer and more vigorous than at any other time since Anderson, Sandburg, Brooks, and Eliot. . . ." This unexpected renaissance seems to have been manufactured for the express purpose of justifying the Stalinist management of left-wing writing; an imaginary crop of masterpieces was invoked to give the Congress its literary *raison d'être*. Actually, of course, literature in America has seldom been so stagnant as it is at present. The excitement of the early 30's has given way to confusion and anemia. Fiction, these last few years, has been on a lower level than that of the 20's. The young poets, including the radicals, seem to be engaged in an endless metaphysical stammer; the naturalistic reportage of the obvious has swallowed up the young novelists; and most of the older writers, after the first few good books, are petrified within their reputations. After expressing himself so optimistically at the Congress, Cowley discovered a few months later (*New Republic,* Nov. 24, 1937) that there is, "this year, a curious analogy between the dullness of the new books and the dull mood that afflicts the literary world. Writers, like everybody else, are carrying on mechanically while waiting for something to turn up, some new hope to avert catastrophe." So much for the renaissance.

Cowley's talk of catastrophe will come as strange news to Granville Hicks, who regards pessimism as the devil's brew. During the discussions at the Congress a popular type was evolved, an ideal man of whom Hicks is the very image. This exemplar of virtue can best be described as the writer who, facing the future, does not look, in the

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memorable words of A. B. Magil, "with microscopes, for pimples on the shining face of the Soviet Union." Hicks' paper dealt with the problem of frustration in American literature—a problem real enough to have become one of the larger concerns of the American critical tradition. But to Hicks this became a matter of party homiletics and Calvinist thrift. Besides counseling writers how to organize their time efficiently, he forewarned them against swerving from the strait path of party doctrine. To Hicks literature is an organizational question, and the terms to which he reduced his subject illustrate the intellectual level of that body of criticism of which he is the leading spokesman.

Compared to Hicks, Newton Arvin is a tenderfoot Stalinist; but primarily he is a diligent and able student of the antiquities of New England. His speech on "The Democratic Tradition in American Letters" had a noble ring to it, dedicated as it was to the evocation of the libertarian ideals of the past. Unfortunately Arvin suffers from the tendency to slice our classic literary figures in half: the good ("progressive") half he presses into the service of present-day politics, and the bad ("reactionary") half he commits to the outer darkness. Such methods make the critic's job easy, but they do not contribute to the understanding of literature as an organic process. Neither the history of esthetics nor the history of thought will be served by this political surgery on the American literary tradition. A conception of Emerson or Thoreau, for example, which is not a whole but an extraction is of little value to criticism.

Stalinism and American Literature

To people unfamiliar with the literary politics of the Communist Party the juxtaposition of these two terms may seem ridiculously melodramatic. In the final analysis, they will ask, what has Stalinism got to do with the actual production of novels, plays, and poems?

Among those who ask such questions are many who are politically indifferent and not a few who are trying to escape unpleasant truths. In discussing literature in relation to Stalinism we are not dealing with those writers to whom literature is merely a means of livelihood or those to whom it is a purely esthetic matter. We have in mind, rather, that advanced body of American writing which responded to the social crisis of our decade. And in this sphere the Stalinists, despite their insane sectarianism, played an advanced rôle in the early 30's. They popularized some of the fundamental ideas of Marxism among American intellectuals, no matter how much they themselves misapplied these ideas in practice. Their literary policy was a reflection of a narrow and factional Party Line, but since the Party still based

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itself on revolutionary principles, it was possible for them to release certain revolutionary forces on the literary scene. "Proletarian literature," whose demise they deny for reasons of political prestige, was never a pure product. It was partly an outgrowth of the social condition of contemporary culture and partly an administrative notion of the Communist Party and of the power cliques among Soviet writers. The program of this literature they carried beyond any possible application, reducing it to an absurdity; nevertheless their agitation for it was valuable for its larger resonance. It changed the direction of literary thought and subjected the theme of class conflict to the workings of the creative imagination.

But the point about the Stalinists now is that they not only stand between the writer and Marxism but between him and the most elementary kind of integrity. The moral degeneration which afflicts the Communist Party cannot but reflect itself in its literary politics. Reformism offers no basis for revolutionary literature, which either strikes at the foundations of the capitalist order or else dissolves into a variety of social service. To expect a bureaucratic, authoritarian regime to nourish a truly critical, revolutionary consciousness in art is to expect miracles. Already the Stalinists have introduced into their literary organs the methods of calumny and frame-up. It is impossible for the intellectual to make the moral and political compromises that Stalinism demands of him without betraying himself.

The tradition of individual judgment, of skepticism, of scientific verification is inherent in the very terms and conditions of knowledge. The collectivity of the Marxist movement aims to raise this tradition to the level of materialist consistency and conscious political direction. A collectivity of blind faith and accomodation, on the other hand, is altogether the opposite of that envisaged by the founders of socialist thought. "Comrade," one would say with Gide, "believe in nothing; accept nothing without proof. The blood of martyrs has never proved anything. There is no religion too foolish not to have had martyrs or not to have awakened burning conviction. Men die in the name of faith and in the name of faith they kill. The taste for knowledge is born in doubt. Cease to believe: Learn. People try to impose a belief only when they have no proofs. Do not let them impose on you. Do not let them take you in."

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ART CHRONICLE:

The Dramas of Uday Shan-Kar

THERE is a qualitative gap between the dancing of Shan-Kar and contemporary exponents of occidental ballet-forms that cannot be limited solely to what the Hindu is able to project as one of the great aristocratic personalities of our time. There are elements in the nature of India and its art that, after 2000 years, permit him to produce a completely grounded unity in an age commonly characterized by misfits and expressionistic jumbles.

Every Hindu art-form has reïterated a delight in bodily exuberance; the Greek is cold and introverted by comparison. Buddhism tried to restore quiet, and for a moment the cathedral-caverns of Ellora and Ajanta loomed with an almost Egyptian austerity, but it was not long before the rocks were noisy again with voluptuous human shapes that spilled out of portals, walls, and capitals. A thousand years later the Moguls fixed the subjugated Hindu spirit into a stiff Persian arabesque, but even their fierce severity could not hold it permanently still.

A first glimpse of India suggests confusion; a closer association discloses an order and discipline not at first apparent; there is a blocking-out of big masses, and lines that coördinate into a rhythmic unity. This is the aesthetic foundation that the Hindus spread wherever they conquered, into Burma, the Indies, even the far-off kingdom of the Khmers. And it relives today in those countries that had been taught so well, through the dance-forms of Java and Cambodia, and its most expressive heritage, the wonderful music-dramas of Bali.

Shan-Kar, aside from his prowess as a dancer, has brought to his art a completely sophisticated intelligence (he started his career as a student of painting in Paris) and an inexhaustible zeal for research and analysis. He retires from the stage this year and will found a school for the study of Hindu culture at Benares. His vast store of knowledge—the long history of Indian art—crops out through his dances and he presents the whole history of his nation's culture. There is the savage jungle folk-art (Bhill Dance), varying forms of the Buddhist and Hindu as they developed through the centuries, and last, in the cruel Sword-dance, the very gesture, pose, and spacing of the Mogul miniatures. The mere turn of a finger, the bending of a wrist, will lead the line back from infinity to the center of the radiating masses. The conscious harmonizing of every anatomical segment right out to the tips of the fingers, the facial expression, the glances, the weird neck motion that apes the striking cobra, combine with a controlled coördination that is tellingly abstract. And finally, in the Shiva-Parvati Nrittya Dwandva, we are confronted through rhythmic suggestion with the awful illusion of six-armed Siva dancing.

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Miro and the Spanish Civil War

LAST YEAR, for the first time, it appeared that there may be some relation between liberalism in politics and what might be termed "radicalism" in the plastic arts. Early in 1937 the liberal-radical governments of Spain and France gave official recognition—and support in more tangible ways as well—to such aesthetic revolutionaries as Picasso, Miró, and Léger. The advent of the Blum ministry caused an extraordinary change in the temper of French art commissions, those traditional enemies of all that is living in art. And the Spanish government, in the midst of its fight for life, has given important commissions to such artists—hitherto unknown in their native land—as Gonzales, Picasso, and Miró.

Picasso and Gonzales have lived for many years in the vicinity of Paris, but Miró has always remained in contact with his countrymen. He has done most of his best work in Catalonia. The selection of Miró, therefore, to execute commissions for the Spanish government is the most appropriate choice of all, and is likely to prove the most fruitful. The war in Spain, especially since it involves also a bitter class struggle, has had disturbing repercussions on Miró's development—at once stimulating and confusing. The shocks* have been accentuated because Miró lacks the sophistication of the other famous Spaniards. The recent work of Picasso, for example, suggests that perhaps his sensibility has been calloused by the many reversals, the swift and acrobatic changes of style which have marked his career in painting. His sincerity in publicizing the cause of Loyalist Spain cannot be questioned, but neither can it be said that he has been able to give mordant or convincing expression to his feelings. In his recent paintings on Civil War themes, the aesthetic impact seems to be bogged in a morass of mannerisms.

Miró, on the other hand, has been able to put on canvas in a much more satisfying way his reactions to the war. This might have been foreseen, for he is less the intellectual constructor, more the commentator upon his inward vision. Above all, his interpretations are unmannered. There is none of the aggressive showmanship with which Picasso is accustomed to startle and insult his audiences, before subduing them with an unapproachable grandeur of style.

Miró's development has been the logical result of the influences which have crowded upon him. He commenced with that dry sharpness of vision which must haunt the air of Northern Spain, which produced Zurbaran, Juan Gris, and the anonymous Catalonian frescoes. Later, as he came in contact with Arp and the Dadaists, who opened up the field

* Since this writing, we have learned that Miró's brother-in-law has been shot by a fascist firing-squad.

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(Painted in Spain during the Revolution)

JOAN MIRÓ
Painting

Summer 1936

Pierre Matisse Gallery

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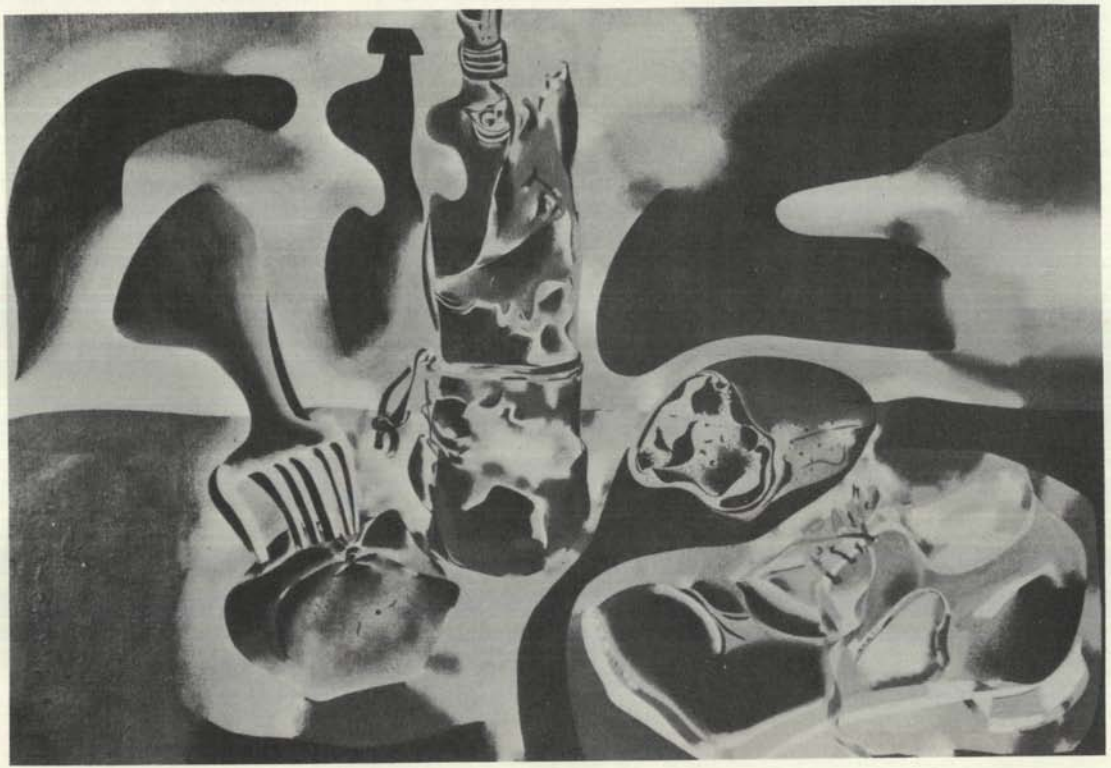

JOAN MIRÓ; The Old Shoe 1937

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of tactile sensations, he alone of their disciples never grew mannered. Here already was the familiar Miró, the world half heavy with gloom, half buoyant with fantasy, alive through tiny linear rhythms that tickle the canvas and create a dance. With the beginning of the present decade the technique was ready to loosen and the forms floated free from the background; the picture opened with an ordered smoothness unknown to Western painting since the days of Simone Martini and the Lorenzetti. He reached his summit with the large mural canvases of 1933; the outcome of the war will determine for the future whether this spacious series is destined to remain the most important achievement of Miró.

No one knows toward what end this development might have led, since the Civil War has obliterated the old creative approaches. For several months Miró endeavored to follow the path he had been opening, but the break in his progression is at once apparent. The suave lyricism dries up before the new staccato rhythms, the color withers into black and grey, the brush can no longer titillate and caress the canvas. The works of these months are confused episodes in a welter of unabsorbed sense-impressions; he must leave Spain for a long contemplation in tranquility and gather up the meaning of the social upheavals that begin to make themselves felt.

It is now eight months since Miró recommenced his work in Paris; he began again with the interminable drawings, broken only by the large mural for the Spanish Government Pavilion at the Exposition; an area so vast must have been a trial to one whose poise and style were still on the verge of rising from such recent ruins. He fills other commissions for his government, and the resulting attempt at remaining impersonal becomes a strain upon him. He must return to his natural beginnings if he is to stand securely, and so rearranges into still-lives the household objects that dominated his first dry period. He is back in the visual world and interprets it once more in the old tight style native to Catalonia, but this time more tortured and mature. For four months he works over a painting of his shoes, but he has not yet found the plastic expression to hold the change of viewpoint. His next painting is to be a self-portrait.

"Doubtless individuality is a sign of decadence," he said recently. "In the great epochs individual and community go along together; but today what do we have?" Perhaps if the nation with which he has so closely identified himself can win its fight for survival, his talent will move forward with its old decisiveness, and "individual and community may go along together," enriching his work with a fulness beyond even the murals of 1933.

GEORGE L. K. MORRIS

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VERSIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

Mary McCarthy

THE American theater, unable to produce a renaissance of its own, has imported an old one. With the withering away of the American playwright the Elizabethan playwright has been called in to understudy. During the nineteen twenties, the most energetic years of the American theater, a few old stagers with repertory companies of confirmed Shakespearean hams were, as if by common consent, appointed official caretakers of the Bard, and an occasional revival of *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet* on the part of a recognized star was no more than a duty call paid to the grave of an honored but distant relative. Today the best and liveliest young talent has been turned full blast on Shakespeare and his colleagues. The last two seasons have seen nine high-powered Elizabethan revivals, with three more promised before the season's end. Since both American and British acting seem to be temporarily in crescendo, and the Elizabethan plays are admittedly good, the result has been two quite stimulating theatrical seasons.

The current phenomenon of a theater without playwrights suggests that classic plays have an additional function beyond those generally assigned to them. Classics, in general, are supposed (a) to please readers and (b) to instruct writers. The present Elizabethan facade of Broadway makes one think that classics, by their very nature, are also meant to fill a cultural interregnum, to tide over an art medium which, without them, would collapse. In a literal sense, this can only be true of the interpretative arts, music, stage production and criticism, and, obviously, such use of the classics is most observable in these fields. I am totally ignorant of music, so of that I cannot speak, but it is painfully clear that in American literary criticism the tendency is to re-examine the great works of the past, since practically no creative literary work is being done in the present. However, in a more obscure and less explicable manner, the classics can, it seems to me, act as a life-line to the primary arts themselves. This is because the relationship between the primary and the interpretative arts is not one-sided but reciprocal, and the classics, by keeping the interpretative arts alive and perhaps even fermenting them a little, can vicariously succor the primary arts. Thus the interest in problems of acting and production which this regime of revivals has imposed upon theater people can hardly fail, if properly handled, to introduce new techniques, which will evoke new playwrights who

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will be anxious to use them. So simplified, this sounds a bit too much like the-house-that-Jack-built to have any but a fairly-tale truth, and, of course, an art so carefully inbred would become too attenuated to be worth preserving. This recipe for the fertilization of the arts is but one of several with which it must be applied jointly; it cannot be taken as a panacea.

At any rate, on Broadway today the process is only in its foetal stage. No serious new techniques are yet being evolved from Shakespearean productions; rather, tricks are being played on them. A spirit of carnival excitement possesses these revivals, and an annual Shakespearean World Series seems to have been written into the rules of the game. Last year it was John Gielgud versus Leslie Howard with *Hamlet* as the ball park; this year it will be Orson Welles versus Maurice Evans with *Henry IV, Part I.* (Mr. Evans on tour is doing an occasional matinee with himself as Falstaff, and expects to bring the play into town in the fall. Mr. Welles anticipates a spring production with himself in the same role.) In these ostentatious rivalries one can see the exploitation of Elizabethan plays in its most blatant and harmless form. In the actual productions of Gielgud's *Hamlet* and Welles's *Caesar,* the exploiter, that is, the stunt artist, wears a more successful disguise.

The two productions were poles apart in theory and in performance, but they met on common ground in their attitude toward the material. In both cases there was a preoccupation with the forms of the play at the expense, of course, of its meanings. Mr. Gielgud was obsessed with the acting traditions of *Hamlet,* and a book recently published by the Oxford University Press, *John Gieldgud's Hamlet* by Rosamond Gilder, makes this very clear. Mr. Gielgud himself has a chapter on "Costumes, Scenery, and Stage Business," in which he appears to have set up a virtual barricade of stage props between himself and the lines of the play. He seems always more interested in his differences or agreements with, say, Sir Henry Irving, as to whether or not a sword should be worn at a certain point, than in any less conspicuously physical feature of the production. His connoisseurship of the fine points of past productions of *Hamlet* seduced him also into a rather desperate hunt for new readings, new inflections in familiar speeches. These were sometimes illuminating, more often tortured and distracting. I do not mean to imply that Mr. Gielgud had no conception of Hamlet. He did, but it was muffled by his precious, strained, almost dandified manipulation of the baggage of the production. His own performance was so decorated, so crammed with minutiae of gesture, pause, and movement that its general outline was imperceptible to an audience.

The rococo style is of all styles probably the most inappropriate

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to a production of Shakespeare, and Mr. Gielgud's *Hamlet,* with all its refinements, was a kind of climax of the rococo. Indeed, I think it impossible to do a good production of Shakespeare in terms of the tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whether actor and producer swallow that tradition whole, or whether they deviate from it in much or in little, as long as their thinking is bounded by that tradition the result will be a more or less competent theatrical barbarism. It is strange that Mr. Gielgud's interest in the stage history of Shakespeare should not have carried him back to Shakespeare's own day. If any style of presentation is relevant to Shakespeare's plays it is surely the style of Shakespeare's period, the style to whose terms he adapted those plays. Yet Mr. Gielgud, speaking of the first scene of *Hamlet,* where the Ghost appears on the sentinel's platform, is full of pity and condescension for the Elizabethans. "One wonders," he says, "how this scene can have been played effectively when it was originally written. A noisy, fidgeting, mostly standing audience, no darkness, afternoon sunshine streaming on to a tidy little platform." The point is that the plays were written with these conditions, consciously or unconsciously, in mind. There being no stage paraphernalia to create the "illusion," the lines themselves had to do the work of scenery, careful costuming and props. It is therefore a tautology to add externally to Shakespeare what exists already in the very fiber of his plays, and the heaviness one feels in most traditional presentations of Shakespeare is the heaviness of repetition, of underscoring. Moreover, it seems as if Shakespeare were intended to be played fast; in fact, I can think of no other way in which blank verse can be read effectively. The caressive attention Mr. Gielgud gave his lines, the pregnant pauses, the judiciously interlarded stage business, all interfered with the sweep of the verse, and the dramatic sweep of the play. This kind of acting (which is and has been, by the way, the prevailing style for Shakespeare) tends to atomize the plays, to reduce them to collections of small and (again) quite heavy nuggets.

If Mr. Gielgud's production was a sort of ornamental appliqué imposed on the original, Mr. Welles's *Caesar* was a piece of plastic surgery. Mr. Welles, to judge from his interpretations of *Macbeth, Dr. Faustus,* and *Caesar,* has the idea an Elizabethan play is a liability which only by the most strenuous showmanship, by cutting, doctoring, and modernizing, can be converted into an asset. Mr. Welles's method is to find a modern formula into which a classic can somehow be squeezed. In the case of *Macbeth,* the formula was *The Emperor Jones;* for *Dr. Faustus* it was a Punch and Judy show; for *Caesar* it was the proletarian play. Now of these three it seems to me only *Dr. Faustus* was truly successful, for here the formula actually

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corresponded in a way to the spirit and construction of the original, and one saw a play that was modern and that was, at the same time, *Dr. Faustus*. The other two have been what people call "interesting"; they have not been good.

The Harlem *Macbeth* is now far enough in the past so that even those who enjoyed it can see that it was at best a pleasant bit of legerdemain. *Caesar,* however, is still thought of as an important production. This is not the first play of Shakespeare's to have been done in modern dress, and superficially, therefore, Mr. Welles's stunt of taking the Romans out of their togas does not sound as novel as on the stage it seems. What is novel about the production is Mr. Welles's motive for putting it in modern dress. In the past, when *Hamlet,* for example, was done by Basil Sydney in a dinner jacket, the motive was, apparently, to say something about Hamlet, to show how modern a character he is. The purpose of the Mercury Theater *Caesar,* on the contrary, was to say something about the modern world, to use Shakespeare's characters to drive home the horrors and inanities of present-day fascism. *Caesar,* in fact, was Mr. Welles's personal acknowledgment of the bankruptcy of contemporary playwriting, for in *Caesar* Mr. Welles as director tried to construct a modern play of his own. Any other interpretation of Mr. Welles's production seems to me nonsensical. I cannot believe that Mr. Welles is, for example, so ignorant of Roman history that he can offer this as his conception of what *actually* happened, that he can equate Caesar with black reaction and Brutus with progressivism, when the exact opposite was the case. On the other hand, I cannot think Mr. Welles so naive as to imagine that Shakespeare in 1599 had premonitions of fascism. The alternative (already mentioned) is that Mr. Welles felt that *Julius Caesar* was an adequate rack on which to hang an anti-fascist play.

Only a very superficial understanding of Shakespeare's play could have permitted Mr. Welles to entertain this notion for long. *Julius Caesar* is about the tragic consequences that come to idealism when it attempts to enter the sphere of action. It is perhaps also a comment on the futility and dangerousness of action in general. In a nonpolitical sense it is a "liberal" play, for it has three heroes, Caesar, Antony, and Brutus, of whom Brutus is the most large-souled and sympathetic. Shakespeare's "liberal" formula, which insists on playing fair with all its characters, is obviously in fearful discord with Mr. Welles's anti-fascist formula, which must have heroes and villains at all costs. The production of *Caesar,* consequently, turns into a battleground between Mr. Welles's play and Shakespeare's play. Mr. Welles has cut the play to pieces; he has very nearly eliminated the whole sordid tragic business of the degeneration and impotence of the re-

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publican forces; he has turned the rather shady Cassius into a shrewd and jovial comedian whose heart is in the right place; he has made Caesar, whose political stature gave the play dignity and significance, into a mechanical, expressionless robot; he has transformed the showy, romantic, buccaneering Antony into a repulsive and sinister demagogue. If he could do all this and still come out with a play that was consistent and uniformly forceful, the experiment might be forgivable. There were some things, however, which could not be cut or distorted, and these by their very incongruous presence, destroy the totality of the play's effect. The most prominent of these unassimilated chunks of Shakespeare is Antony's final speech ("This was the noblest Roman of them all"—too famous, doubtless, to be cut), which in the mouth of the unreliable monster of the Welles production seemed an unconvincing and even tasteless tribute to the memory of Brutus.

The Mercury Theater *Caesar,* it goes without saying, had virtues that are lacking in the ordinary Shakespearean revival. The simplicity of the mounting, the calm, conversational tone of the players, an excellent if wrongheaded performance by George Coulouris as Antony, were all new and commendable. There were, on the other hand, certain vulgarities of playing that arose from the oversimplification of a complex work. Orson Welles's Brutus was cloying and monotonous: his performance seemed to be based on the single theory that if you drop your voice two registers below the voices of the other actors you will give an impression of innocent saintliness.

Yet whatever the technical virtues or faults of the Mercury Theater company, its energies, like the energies of Mr. Gielgud, seem to me to be misapplied. If the classics are to play any important rôle in the American theater, their contents ought at least to be examined. To encrust them either with traditional ornament or with modern formulae for playwriting is to shut them off from the world and the theater. Acting as an art cannot exist by itself; it must feed on the material of plays. Both Mr. Welles and Mr. Gielgud, who in a peculiar way are trying "to lead their own lives," to make themselves independent of plays, are the potential victims of a sterile cleverness, which can readily lead them to a very dead end.

Mr. Gielgud and Mr. Welles, unfortunately, represent the dominant trends in the production of revivals. Only Maurice Evans, who stands outside both the old school and the new, has given a Shakespearean performance in which the actor was in harmonious relation with the play. Yet Mr. Evans has so carefully eschewed eccentricities and mannerisms of style that he will not easily attract imitators. Mr. Welles's forthcoming Falstaff will probably create a greater stir; my money is on Mr. Evans.

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CONGRESSMEN – FLOWERS – CLENCH

Balcomb Greene

MUCH which has happened to me is of small significance and much which I think about has no meaning because I am that sort of a man in 1937. I am close to forty, it was said yesterday by a congressman and by a professor and by some small fry of a poet that death begins at forty. For an American.

Life begins at forty or at sixty for he who has feathered his nest and who can defend his nest against young men, who can lean on precedent and his subordinates and his coupons. Friendships.

The Essay on Friendship I do not remember clearly.

I am young in the sense that I lean forward.

Death has begun for me.

"I saw you with a woman yesterday, you old rascal. She had flowers in her hair. It was spring. You were laughing together. I had no idea! And you were not married."

Other men were reading as avidly as I our national literature of sophistication. The latest book of Cabell was upon their shelves before it was on mine. What were their names? Erskine? Van Doren? At evening you read them and told your wife how right Havelock Ellis was. Remember it? Remember?

"Always meticulous is the idea. Get it? Leave no stone unturned in assembling your detail. Check all your generalizations. And nuances, my good fellow, are but a haziness to deceive you."

I have noted in particular the way your hands all go up together. Palm outward and the arm slightly inclined. You are Fascists and you are Hatred and you are Devotion and from this you do not vary. Or I have seen you with fists clenched and for a while I have been with you until some spry fellow among you has said: SEE! HIS HAND IS TOO CLENCHED! HIS HAND IS NOT CLENCHED! He's a TROTSKYITE!

And the devil of a brilliant and a muddled man in Mexico came back to me.

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I never liked his beard. I liked it—too.
You almost had me arguing that the man is brilliant.
You mustn't talk when you clench your fist.
Or don't clench things when you talk.

"Your justification finally is not moral nor can it be poetic.
Partly it's biological.
"Then there are the classes, the Class Struggle.
"Dialectical Materialism."

It's okay about that dialectical materialism, only don't clench things when you talk.

"And nuances!"
What about nuances?
"I don't like them and they aren't dialectical."
I know what got YOU sore.
"Rubbish!"
It was that woman.
"Liar!"

She had flowers in her hair and it was spring, we were not married and we were laughing together.
I am young in the sense that I lean forward.
Partly it's biological, death has begun for me.

Only don't clench things
When you talk
Talk

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CROSS COUNTRY

D. C. – 1938

THIS IS the imperial accent, the Roman rhetoric. Columns in rows, pediments loaded with ponderous allegories in stone, massive blocks of masonry—dykes against the foaming tides of the popular life. The starlings fling themselves against the stolid façades, life spurts among the pediments, the graven seals and the pompous republican insignia are perching places for starlings, a rush of birds bursting like a grenade against the masonry, cascading over the tile roofs into the sky, distant rustle of bird voices and the silent stone.

These birds are considered a civic pest. The police have tried shooting them, they have tried to poison them. They have posted men to shout at them, to wave things at them, to scare them away. But the starlings persist. They specially haunt the interminable façades built by Hoover and Mellon.

D. C. is the city of spittoons. Big brassbellied monsters squat on the carpeted floors of the Capitol. In the newer buildings, they are small, neatly enamelled in dark green and white, discreet.

The Room is nightmare tall. The light is utterly dead, too dead even to be harsh, a corpse pallor shed from bowls high overhead, a light as cold and sterile as the atmosphere of an extinct planet. One sits softly on red plush pew benches. A spoken word, if any one dared, would reverberate as in a tomb, or a bank vault. One feels one's flesh puffing out in corpse-dropsy. In this Room, smelling faintly of marble, windowless, pillared, breathing is a slight indiscretion. The nine old men slip from behind the velvet draperies and settle into their appointed seats. Justice Cardozo is said to have said: "We ought to ride in on elephants."

The Senators sit at grammar-school desks, with lids that lift up. (But this is a schoolboy's paradise, where no one "pays attention" and where special messengers are provided to facilitate note-passing.) A few wear cutaways. But a Senator is unmistakeable even in a business suit. An opulent air of authority, an expansiveness of gesture, a wellfed satiated look. Above all, the Senatorial handclasp.

An elderly man appears at the back of the centre aisle, in his hand a large envelope with red seals, a burlesque monster of an envelope like

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the one carried by the Fish Footman of *Alice in Wonderland*. The orator of the moment allows himself to be interrupted. "A message from the President to the Senate," the emissary intones. Another functionary takes the envelope and bears it to the presiding officer on his dais. The orator resumes.

Going from the Senate to the House of Representatives is like stepping from the Ritz into a flophouse. For the Senate's deep red carpet, a bluegrey linoleum. For the individual mahogany desks, curving rows of theatre seats. For somnolent, dignified calm, a monkey-house chatter. One sniffs for disinfectants.

Democratic government seems to require that those who make the laws and those who interpret them shall spend a large part of their time listening, or rather not listening, to other people talk. The Senators don't listen to each other. They confer on leather settees, they send page boys on errands, they inspect their fingernails, they read newspapers—while The Voice goes on and on. The Supreme Court Justices don't listen to the lawyers. They sit aloft, glazed with ennui, their relief expressing itself only in the droop of a hand shading a brow.

No one listens because what is being said is rarely of importance. Or what is said is insignificant because no one ever listens. The data are all on paper somewhere—or will be presently put on paper. As for the opinions, these are already well known and neither Senators nor Justices change their minds easily. The talking seems to be entirely for the sake of form, a veneer over the crudity of the actual processes of government. Everybody has his say. Free speech. A fair hearing. In a democracy every word must be allowed utterance, must be transcribed by the appointed officials and printed by the Government Printing Office. The U. S. Government is the largest manufacturer of words in the world. The harsh blue lights burn all night in the interminable pressrooms.

D. C. is also the city of The Record. This is the universal eavesdropper. Congressmen make speeches *to* each other but *for* The Record. Senate committees question important citizens to build up The Record. Documents, stenographic notes, affidavits, statistical tables, poems, newspaper clippings, business letters are shovelled into the hopper, to come out, crushed and dried and standardized, in the impersonal Governmental type face on the regulation Governmental paper. The life of our times happens all over the country, but only such manifestations as by chance or favor penetrate the consciousness of D. C., only these are preserved in The Record. All day and all night the presses thunder, galloping to keep up with The Record. Already it would take ten thousand scholars, twenty thousand, a lifetime to read through the accumulation. And the avalanche of data pours on, a turbid flood that buries as much as it uncovers, in which the strongest swimmer drowns.

The lawmakers don't swim. Resting elbows on the school desks, they let the tide stream onward and think of their constituents.

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Ninety-six desks, and on each a pile of newly printed matter, continually refreshed by the page boys. Senators with literary tastes must find it hard to resist a dilletantish toying, to read a paragraph here, a title page there, and then to pick up another neatly printed pamphlet fresh from the press. The distraction offered by this constantly renewed supply of reading matter, brought to one's desk as inevitably as the seasons change—and with as little personal reaction on one's part—such an ease of distraction must be debilitating. These pamphlets are State papers, and it is no doubt a Senatorial duty to read them. But how difficult to accomplish any sustained thinking, to get anything really *done* with all these pleasant interruptions!

The Senators relax, the justices are ostentatiously moribund, but they know their every movement is being watched, tensely, expectantly, by boys in knickerbockers. In response to signals which are imperceptible to the onlooker—a lifted finger, a flicker of the eyebrow—the boys dart about like swallows. One doesn't like to think what it must do to the ego of these judges and lawmakers—all this frantic running about at their slightest nod.

It is an alien language: women with ample classical breasts ordering their heavy stone limbs according to *Beaux Arts* rules; horns of plenty, rams' heads, fasces, acanthus leaves, olive and myrtle, the symbols and flora of another culture; groups of stone people striking attitudes over the revolving doors of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. The men in snap-brim hats, the women swaying on high heels who enter these classic portals pay no attention to the myrtle and the fasces. They are not part of their lives. They are part of no life except the conservative, defensive, closed life of the buildings they ornament. These buildings are fortresses and the enemy is the life of the people.

DWIGHT MACDONALD

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SKETCHES IN LITTLE STEEL

I

CLEVELAND AVENUE S. W. in Massillon, Ohio runs directly into the gates of Republic Steel's Central Alloy plant. The last house on the left hand side of the street faces the gates diagonally, and commands a complete view of them. The house is a two-story, drab, unpainted, wooden structure, indistinguishable in the main from scores of the neighborhood's dwellings occupied by steel workers and their families. After the strike in "little steel" began, this last-houses-on-the-street became the center of activity. It was converted into a strike headquarters and strike commissary. Here strikers came for assignment to or release from picket duty, for their coffee and sandwiches, and to hear latest developments in the strike situation. The establishment consisted of an office, a general sit-around room, a kitchen, and pantry. The workers' wives had charge of the place, and managed to keep it clean and orderly. Then, suddenly, this headquarters was turned into a mass of ruins the equal of which Il Duce's bombers would find it difficult to duplicate.

The outer front wall was spattered with buck shot and deep gashes made by tear-gas projectiles. All the windows were broken, and faded green window shades, with curiously shaped cuts in them, as though slashed by a maniac, flapped in and out of the window frames like loosely hanging sleeves of a scarecrow. The interior was aptly described by the deputy, who escorted newspaper representatives through the rooms, as a "mess." Without the slightest trace of emotion he kept repeating: "It's a mess all right, it sure is a mess." Broken chairs, an overturned leather covered sofa, a table with two legs splintered in the middle, boxes, desk drawers, packages of every size and description were piled into a fantastically conglomerous heap on one side of the room. The other side presented an even more grotesque sight. Loaves of bread, literally hundreds of them, wrapped in their colorful cellophane wrappers, were scattered over the floor in greater or lesser piles, abandoned to a kind of merciless uselessness. A small oblong table peered out from under one of the bread piles and conspicuously displayed a package of ham.

It was impossible to enter the kitchen for the flies which swarmed in it. One noticed from a cursory glance a refrigerator door torn loose from one of its hinges, huge pans and kettles in crazy half overturned position, with their contents spilled over the stove and floor. The room which served as an office was littered with broken furniture and piles of torn papers and circulars. Copies of *Steel Labor,* with their red headlines, mixed curiously with the bright green circulars and formed a kind of mad color discord. Several pictures of conventional landscapes and enlarged photographs hung at odd angles, their glass, and in some instances their frames, broken. Only one picture escaped this fate. Its

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wholeness in this scene of chaos and destruction appeared downright uncanny. Even more uncanny was the broad, careless smile which emanated from it. It was the picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Not more than twenty feet from the house a sizable crimson-red spot on the pavement attracted passersby. The spot had been scrubbed and scraped, but there it was still, a stark bit of testimony to the night of terror. It was a spot made by the blood of Fulgencio Calzada, a striking steel worker, a union man, a young Spaniard who met his Franco in Massillon, Ohio. He was shot in back of the head, shot dead as he was running to safety from an unprovoked attack.

Massillon was slow to respond to the back-to-work movement. Even after Governor Davey's "tin soldiers" came upon the scene, and offered safe conduct to work, the men still failed to respond. A more workable strategy had to be found. The first step consisted in getting several car loads of professional back-to-work-goers, escort them through the picket line with the aid of the militia, burn a lot of coal and tar paper so that plenty of smoke might be seen on the outside, and go through the motions of pretending that steel was being made, in the expectation that the strikers would lose courage. A few did, but only a few. The Greeks, Hungarians, Poles, Slavs, and Italians were not fooled. They knew the mills could not very well make steel without them. Many of these men do not read English, some are altogether illiterate, consequently they could not read the extravagant newspaper accounts of the number of people who returned to work. They looked about them, saw all their cronies out, then looked at the smoke and chuckled.

The situation was becoming critical. Foremen and straw bosses were sent to workers' homes asking them to return to work. The union countered this move by sending union committees likewise to make at-home calls. There were more union men than bosses to do the at-homes and the back-to-work movement did not move. Open-hearth workers, and other highly skilled men, were especially urged to stay out, and without them no steel could be made. On Saturday, July 10, Republic's Central Alloy Plant in Massillon, employing some 4,500 men, closed down voluntarily and everyone of the 600 men who had been in the mill was given the names of two workers whom he had to see during the week-end and urge to come to work. It was a difficult assignment. It is hard enough on a steel worker to play the scab role for himself, but to urge others to do scabbing, is next to impossible. The assignments were either entirely ignored or were unconvincingly presented. They produced no results. Some of those who had been in the plant hesitated to go back lest they be reprimanded for not bringing others with them. When the plant reopened Sunday night, very few workers showed any inclination to go in.

A court injunction had been procured the week before which limited pickets to from six to twelve at any one gate. In compliance with this injunction the strikers remained away from the gate, but about 200 of them gathered around the headquarters, and from that post were able

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to see the gates and to observe with considerable satisfaction that the back-to-work movement was practically standing still. At about 11:00 P. M. a troop of 35 men, most of whom were later identified as foremen, passed across the street in military formation, and moved on toward the gates. They massed themselves so as to face the strikers, and before anyone knew what was happening bullets began to fly. It was later learned that the immediately provoking incident had to do with a motorist's refusal to turn off his automobile lights. The motorist contended that he had started his motor, was ready to pull out, and therefore could not turn off the lights. The deputies, however, would stand for no argument. "Let's bust 'em up," the leader shouted, and the firing began.

The gathering in front of the strike headquarters was so startled that for a few seconds everyone stood still, then they began to run like deer, hopping, jumping, ducking. The bullets followed them. One was dead when picked up. Another died the next day. A dozen more were sent to the hospital. A few nursed their wounds at home, preferring the risk of improper medical care to that of having their names exposed to the authorities. Two factors account for the reason why there were not many more casualties: (a) the deputies had to stop briefly to replenish their ammunition and many of the people got away during that interval; (b) most of the deputies were particularly poor marksmen.

The shooting and rapid dispersal of the strikers was only the beginning of a night of terror which lasted until early dawn. Reinforced by city police from Massillon and Canton, as well as by two car loads of militiamen, the original squad of deputized foremen went on a sadistic manhunt. Their leader, who also led in the shooting and bragged about it, was a man named Harry Curley, a former army officer, reported in the press as assistant to the Massillon Chief of Police, although there was no public record of his appointment to that post. After invading the strike headquarters, and leaving it in the condition already described, they proceeded to the homes and rooming houses in the vicinity. They forced their way into these places without warrant, without permission, without warning. One rooming house on McKinley Avenue, a few blocks away from the riot scene, had every door in its 28 rooms broken. The invaders allowed no time or opportunity for the unlocking of doors, but broke right into the rooms and houses, dragging all male occupants off to jail.

Those who were in their night clothes were not given an opportunity to dress. Two men were arrested in their pajamas, several were dragged off in their bare feet. They were beaten, thrown down flights of stairs, herded as many as 20 in a single cell, fed on bread and water, questioned as to their affiliations and citizenship, whether or not they would go back to the picket line; photographed, fingerprinted, made to sign waivers so as to immunize the community against suits for false arrest; then after from 24 to 72 hours were released without charge. Out of a total of 200 arrests, only 11 charges were filed. These included nine

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charges of suspicious person, one reckless driving, and one carrying concealed weapons. The weapon in question was a pocket knife.

One of the arrested men, a Greek, was particularly worried over his arrest because he feared his friends in the old country might hear about it and think he committed a crime. "I work this country 25 years," he explained. "Only once I visited old country. I no like him there, only now maybe America aint so good either. I never done nothing bad, and them bosses in the mill know it too. I don't drink, (a bit hesitatingly) I no fool around women, all I do is smoke, that's all. Now they arrest me and ask me all kind foolish question. 'What's that button you got?' Oh, that, I say, that's my union button, I belong CIO and I no fraid say it. 'You go back picket line?' they say. Sure I go back picket line. They say, 'you got three day, you go back picket line and next time maybe you get three year.' I say, I no care I get ten year, I go back picket line."

II

ALL THROUGH the afternoon loud speakers were shrieking final speeches and announcements at the crowd gathered in the Wye. It is Aliquippa's busiest intersection, so named because it is shaped like the letter Y. Hopewell Avenue, a narrow colorless street, starts from a split in Franklin Avenue, just where the highway turns in from Pittsburgh, and extends like the narrow stem of the Y. The two upper stems extend one in the direction of the main mill gate, the other in the direction of the business part of the town. People gather at the Wye for all sorts of reasons. They come here to do their shopping, to get their drinks, to meet their friends, to pick up gossip, and on this afternoon of May 12, 1937, they gathered to listen to final word from the union crowd, which came over a microphone attached to the window of a photographic studio on the second floor of a ramshackle building directly facing the Wye.

The studio belonged to a shriveled up little Italian of about 50, nervous, excited, and immensely pleased with his rôle of host. He maneuvered his camera from one window to another photographing the crowd, all the while talking to no one in particular, and saying mostly, "Look at the crowd, my, my, I gonna take 'nother picture, I don't care couple dollar, I want everybody see big crowd in Aliquippa no fraid J & L."

There was the usual line-up of speakers. Sub-regional director Joe Timko, organizers Mallinger, Porter, Bozareli, Smiley, were all there. They made their usual speeches, and then, just in order to add a new voice, they called on this author to "say a few words." I picked up the cue from the other speakers, and touched on several generalities in the peppery tone set by the others. When I finished and resumed my seat

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at the window, I saw a woman motioning to me through the glass door leading into the hallway. When I asked her what she wanted she motioned for me to be quiet, led me into "the other room," which served as a kitchen, dining room, and bedroom, closed the door so that no disturbance would reach the studio, then shook my hand with feeling and said, "that was great, that was great. You come all the way from Pittsburgh to speak to these people. That's great, that's great." She did not seem to know what else to say, but just then the need for saying anything disappeared for the host, who turned out to be this woman's husband, came tearing up the stairs and into the room with a bottle of coco-cola. "Here," he said, breathlessly, overcome by his rapid ascent. "Your throat must be dry after that fine speech." I had spoken only about ten minutes, my throat was not in the least dry, and I was totally unprepared for such solicitude from my audience. However, I took the drink and began to sip away. "Maybe you want sandich?" he said suddenly, rushing toward the door. "I go get you one downstairs." "No, no," I pleaded. I was not in the least hungry. He seemed disappointed that I would not let him do something for me. He finally began to tell the reason why he was eager to see J & L licked.

He had not worked in any mill for a number of years, and had no particular desire to. But a brother of his had been fired for union activity, and his brother's son, just turning twenty, had never been able to get a job. The family had been on relief for a long time. "And," added the host, "thasa why I wanna get even with J & L." He suddenly got a bright idea. "I gonna take 'nother picture. This sure big crowd."

With him out of the room, the wife became more talkative. "How do you like this dress?" she asked, pointing with pride to a lavender two-piece affair with shiny black buttons, which she was wearing. "I made it myself. Last night I stayed up real late to finish it, because I wanted to have it for the strike." Later that day, close to midnight, when some 10,000 people crowded into the Wye, defying a heavy downpour of rain, and when my own clothes were drenched, I ran up to the studio to dry off a bit. The husband was not there. He was "somewhere on the picket line," and the wife sat at the window, her hands clasped, her lips pursed, her colorless eyes absorbed in watching the crowd. "It's wonderful, ain't it?" she gasped. "They all came out. My husband says there's nobody inside. And they're going to stay out too. You know," she said, finally turning her eyes away from the window in order to address me, "I sure am glad I've got my washing and sewing all done, because I wanna watch this. I wouldn't get away from here for anything. I don't care if I don't sleep or eat. I want to watch this." During the following day, as I passed through the Wye, I looked up several times, and ran up twice to rest a bit. Through it all she sat there in her lavender dress, her hands clasped, lips pursed, staring tirelessly, endlessly, watching Aliquippa "get even with J & L."

ROSE M. STEIN

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BOOKS

NEW VERSE

THE MAN WITH THE BLUE GUITAR, AND OTHER POEMS. *By Wallace Stevens. Alfred A. Knopf.* $2.00.

The poems of Wallace Stevens present an elegant surface. It has been mentioned often, and misunderstood even more frequently, but its affiliations are fairly clear. The same dandyism of speech and the same florid irony is to be found in such writers as James Branch Cabell and Carl Van Vechten, in certain poems of J. C. Ransom and Conrad Aiken, even in the prose style of Santayana, in the poems of the forgotten Donald Evans, and going further back in time, in the moonstruck poems of Dowson, Laforgue, and Verlaine, the Verlaine of "Fêtes Galantes," and the Laforgue who sighs that existence is so quotidian. This is a formidable family, but the resemblances are unmistakeable. They are also superficial; Stevens has made a significant virtue out of the dubious verbal habits involved in the tendency from which he seems, in some way, to have derived his style. He is unquestionably a much better writer than most of the above authors.

Perhaps it is worthwhile attempting to account for the kinship by relating Stevens to the *milieu* which must have surrounded him when he began to write. As a hypothesis, one may suppose that his style crystallized in the days when *The Smart Set* was the leading literary magazine, when one knew French with pride, discussed sophistication, feared to be provincial, and aspired to membership among the élite. The backwash or lag of that day is still apparent in the Greenwich Village tearom, and one can scarcely doubt that among the admirers of Miss Millay, there are some who still exist in that period of time. To be a poet at that time was to be peculiar; merely to be interested in the arts was to take upon oneself the burden of being superior, and an exile at home. It may be that as a result of some such feeling, Stevens called his wonderful discourse on love *Le Monocle de Mon Oncle,* thus resorting to French, and thus mocking, as so often in his titles, the poem itself, as if the poet were extremely self-conscious about the fact of being a poet. It ought to be added that the title of the poem in question does, nevertheless, have a distinct meaning in the poem.

In the present volume, Stevens provides another example, the best one perhaps, of how much there is in his poetry beneath the baroque decoration. The surface would seem to be a mask, which releases the poet's voice, a guise without which he could not speak. But the sentiments beneath the mask are of a different order. If we rest with our impression

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of the surface, we get nothing but a sense of play and jocular attitudinizing:

To strike his living hi and ho,
To tick it, tock it, turn it true,

If we dig into just such usages and then come back to the poem as a whole, we understand the justice of such verbalism, its necessity, and we are confronted with a mind of the utmost seriousness, aware and involved in the most important things in our lives.

The imagination and actuality, the blue guitar which is poetry and things as they are, constitute the antithesis to which Stevens devotes a varied discourse in the present book. In the title poem or suite of poems, there are thirty-three short lyrics in which the various relationships between art and the actual world are named, examined, turned upside down, and transformed into the terms of Stevens' personal vision. In the opening lyric, we are given the suggestion of some lack in the nature of poetry. The poet is addressed by his audience:

They said, "You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are"

The poet replies that the imagination must of necessity alter and distort actuality, and the audience then extends its demand:

"But play you must
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar,
Of things exactly as they are."

The difficulty is that poetry is somehow insufficient. The incidence of that insufficiency, its present point, is made evident further on in the poem:

The earth is not earth, but a stone,
Not the mother that held men as they fell,

But stone, but like a stone, no, not
The mother but an oppressor

It is because of an enforced awareness that his time is one of immense conflict and derangement that the poet has been compelled to consider the nature of poetry in its travail among things as they are. The basic preoccupation, the apprehension which has produced two volumes in two years, was revealed most explicitly in the previous book, *Ideas of Order*:

There is order in neither sea nor sun,
There are these sudden mobs of men,

These sudden clouds of faces and arms,
An immense suppression, freed,
These voices crying without knowing for what,

Except to be happy, without knowing how. . . .

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This is the way, then, in which Stevens answers these sudden mobs of men, these sudden clouds of faces and arms: he justifies poetry, he defines its place, its rôle, its priceless value. Nothing could be more characteristic of this poet, of his virtues and also of his limitations, and one cannot think of an answer of greater propriety.

The second sequence of poems, "Owl's Clover," consists of five meditations in blank verse, all of them concerned with extending the theme of the fate of art amid terrifying change and destruction, and envisaging the kind of place toward which history is moving:

Shall you,
Then, fear a drastic community evolved
From the whirling, slowly and by trial; or fear
Men gathering for a final flight of men,
An abysmal migration into possible blue?

The fear is in the foreground and is complicated by the themes which were Stevens' direct subject in *Harmonium,* the brutality and chaos of Nature, which is here figured forth in a new symbol, Africa; and also the absence of belief, the departure of God, the angels, and heaven. The attitudes toward what is to come are complex and ambiguous, as they ought to be. The poet can only regard the possibilities which he fears and state his hope:

Basilewsky in the bandstand played
"Concerto for Airplane and Pianoforte,"
The newest Soviet reclame. Profound
Abortion, fit for the enchanting of basilisks. . . .
What man of folk-lore shall rebuild the world,
What lesser man shall measure sun and moon,
What super-animal dictate our fates?
As the man the state, not as the state the man.

But finally and unequivocally, in the last poem of the volume, the poet salutes the men that are falling, for whom God and the angels have become identical with the cause for which they are falling:

Taste of the blood upon his martyred lips,
O pensioners, O demagogues and pay-men!

This death was his belief, though death is a stone
This man loved earth, not heaven, enough to die.

This is clearly a poetry which flows from a mind in love not only with the beautiful, but also with the just.

There are, however, distinct limitations also. From beginning to end, in *Harmonium* as well as in the present volume, these poems are absorbed in "responses" to various facts. They are absorbed to such an extent that the facts can scarcely get into the poems at all. We may compare Stevens to William Carlos Williams, whom he admires and who may be said to represent the other extreme, a poet whose whole effort is to get facts into his poem with the greatest exactitude and to keep everything

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else out. One beautiful line in particular in "Owl's Clover" ("The sound of z in the grass all day") emphasizes by contrast how little direct observation there is in Stevens. There is no specific scene, nor time, nor action, but only the mind moving among its meanings and replying to situations which are referred to, but not contained in, the poem itself. "Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds," another poet writes, "The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea, Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter." By thus placing the fact within the poem, the response to the fact gains immeasurable strength and relevance. In Stevens, however, the poet "strides" "among the cigar stores, Ryan's lunch, hatters, insurance and medicines" without convincing the reader that he is walking on an actual street. There is always an abstractness present; everything is turned into an object of the imagination. Certain weaknesses result: the word-play does not always escape the adventitious frivolity for which it is always mistaken by the careless reader; the poem is sometimes extended not by a progress of perception, or of meaning, but one word and one phrase multiplies others; and, to sum up these defects, the poet is "too poetic." It may also be that the burden of this style is responsible for the faults which have always been present in Stevens' blank verse, a lack of variety in going from line to line, a difficulty with overflow, and lately, in "Owl's Clover," a tendency to anapestic substitution which unsettles the sonorous Miltonic period.

Virtue and defect, however, seem to be inseparable. The magnificence of the rhetoric necessitates an exclusion of narrative elements, necessitates the whole weight of the verbalism, and, on the other hand, makes possible the extreme range and freedom of the symbols. The blue guitar, the statue, the duck, the greenest continent, and above all the bread and the stone presented here for the first time are figures and metaphors of a richness and meaningfulness which justify the method. The poems taken as a whole constitute a special kind of museum, of a very familiar strangeness, located, because of the extent of the poet's awareness, in the middle of everything which concerns us.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ

READING THE SPIRIT. *By Richard Eberhart. New York. Oxford University Press.* $2.50.

Mr. Eberhart is not an easy poet; he is too energetic, which he luckily cannot help, and he fails at critical points to complete his poems on the page either as examples of perception or as examples of craft, which is a failure that, luckily, he can help. It is his predicament, and ours, that his talent has seldom in the particular poem either found a satisfactory medium or discovered its governing limits. We feel him

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keep sensibility on the stretch in the struggle to get out of the predicament, and we see him in the rashness of poetic desperation resort to the overt modes—to what can be formularised of the rhythms, idioms, and typographical notations—of his chosen ancestors. What matters is that in this struggle and even in this resort a great number of images, insights, and vitalising observations are struck off; rich material of everyman's dilemma is exposed; and the general body of his work has the look, the feel, the twist, of poetry. Here is an example, regrettably called "Cynic Song."

Joy's my what I'll be, my little son,
Who's not one weight of breath taken in.
He's not yet singing, he's not yet made
And no one has touched his tender skin.
Not born of woman! who, when he'll be,
Will breathe like sunlight, will look on me.
And I'll his child hands warm
And feed him on thought tenderly.

Except for the last line, which runs down hill because poorly phrased, this poem is a kind of omen; it elucidates its own implication and declares its own meaning on its own level of language. The poem called "In a Hard Intellectual Light" expresses the same theme on a different, more generalised level. I quote the first two and the last stanzas.

In a hard intellectual light
I will kill all delight,
And I will build a citadel
Too beautiful to tell

O too austere to tell
And far too beautiful to see,
Whose evident distance
I will call the best of me.

. . . . . .

For the hard intellectual light
That kills all delight
And brings the solemn, inward pain
Of truth into the heart again.

Here the language is on the symbolic level, and the poem is a version—or a secular conversion, as Mr. Burke might say— of the egocentric dilemma. I do not quote it for its ideas, its philosophy if there is one, but because it represents, with the "Cynic Song," the two extremes of control which Mr. Eberhart's work exhibits: control, that is, of poetic means.

The quotation nevertheless brings us to another aspect of Mr. Eberhart's difficulty, the aspect which is likely to be miscalled philosophical. Mr. Eberhart is philosophical only in a vague all-round way. He has no system, his intellect does not operate in his verse as a mature instrument, he falls back on but does not really use, except emotionally, some of the conventions of the problem of knowledge. He is, however, concerned

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with the struggle to actualise his individual experience of good and evil, the true and inadequate, the beautiful and flat. This is the business of a poet, not of a philosopher; and it is a very ambitious sort of poet to be.

This ambition is the seed of the positive side of Mr. Eberhart's talent; it is the drive, or habit, or trope of his imagination, that keeps him at the poet's business of making something which can be appreciated *primarily* apart from its accidental inspiration—that is to say, something as near the actual or the objective as words can come. The whole matter may be managed for our present purpose by recalling T. S. Eliot's comment on Matthew Arnold's remark that "no one can deny that it is of advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world." Mr. Eliot thought a beautiful world an advantage to mankind in general. "But," he went on, "the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory." Now that is a good deal to be able to see; it involves an inviolate sensibility, requires a visitation of the Muse, and demands a pretty continuous mastery of craft. Yet it is just some such profession that Mr. Eberhart's poetry wants to make; just as it is some formula of *escape* from this profession that your poetry of negative talent hints at, and your pure poetastry even promises to provide.

That Mr. Eberhart comes short is not surprising; and the reason, facilely thought of, is obvious: he so far lacks a theme adequate to his ambition as he sees it, or perhaps it would be more accurate to put it that he has never so felt a theme as to require his consistent utmost in craft. At any rate, the facts are that his poems show unevenness in execution, strain of sensibility amounting sometimes to falsified emotion, inconsistency in the modes of language in single poems, relapse into the banal when the banal is not wanted, and verbal or typographical experiment out of control. Most of these faults are at their worst when the poems present the problem of imitation in acute form; or put the other way round the faults tend to minimise themselves when his sensibility is not deracinated by using other men's modes conspicuously. It is the difference between gross imitation and genuine imitation. Michael Roberts, in his introduction to this volume, finds the influence of Blake in "In a Hard Intellectual Light," and we may perhaps distinguish a sort of Yeats-Hopkins influence in "Cynic Song"; these are imitation digested and genuine, and it is flattery to point them out. Gross imitation is something else again.

One of the most interesting, and certainly one of the most ambitious poems in the book is "Four Lakes' Days," in which the poet walks four different landscapes in four different weathers. The sense of landscape is fresh and stirring and intense; in its best passages, which are often inseparable from the worst, it revitalises and redirects the sensibility. Here is the best.

In air-shiver against white wall
A flower, blue, incandescent

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Does dance on the eye-ball;
It makes beauty effervescent.
At Fell Foot (charm) farm. Rob
This, clover-over-the-dales;
Smells of cows; good hob-
Nail, spike my ear! and kissing pails.

Till the twilight folds and all's
As blue as the bluewashed walls.

The image in the first four lines is creative observation: it adds to the ability of the eye to see; and the last two lines carry besides possible observation their own ominous secret symbolism. As for the other lines (charm) is inexcusable, and together they form a complex trick which defeats its own solution by being unreadable.

On the next page, a little apart, I find these two contrasted passages.

Not the woundedness of the soul;
Of desire, the joy. And, soaked all day,
Sky, earth make each other whole,
You between, cold mote in the gray.

. . . . . .

So he, I go, we
Slow to the pelt-rain-drum's rally-
Of-loneliness in rained-on weather.

Of which the first forces an apposition which may or may not be, however strained, an excellent image, but is at least readable verse, with metrical joints and a common speed; and of which the second is not verse at all, but at most a kind of shrieking notation, from which we gather that at this point some emotion, not present, was needed.

I think all the faults listed above, including the banal (charm), are exemplified in these passages from what I repeat is the most interesting poem in the book. The whole poem is I think an imitation of Hopkins, the good passages genuine imitation because Mr. Eberhart had a subject, and the bad passages gross imitation because Mr. Eberhart lacked his subject. Hopkins' extraordinary and almost physical grasp of landscape in words, came, one supposes, from the struggle of an intensely detailed love to express, not itself, but what was loved; and this in turn came out of Hopkins' convicted faith that God might best be glorified in the knowledge of his created things. I do not know what Mr. Eberhart's motive may be; but I am sure that he does not naturally suffer from the disability of language of which Hopkins complained and which he tried to improve. Mr. Eberhart goes the whole hog, disability and all, of Hopkins on purpose, using as an expressive means to substitute for subject matter what was in Hopkins an expressive obstruction. In Hopkins even at his worst things forced themselves together and struck in the impact an inner light. When Mr. Eberhart imitates Hopkins to get out of his own necessity, his elements hinder each other and fall apart at

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the centre; only necessity could have driven them together. Gross imitation is its own punishment.

I do not charge Mr. Eberhart with insincerity; it would be nearer home to charge him with insufficient insincerity—for the best of poetry is Jesuits' trade, once the end is in view. It may rather be put that Mr. Eberhart wants to put more into his verse than he has got ready in imaginative form, and that he also employs imaginative devices beyond the scope of the material he actually does have. If he *himself* wrote the passages complained of above, and others in other poems drawn from Hopkins and Eliot, not only would the source of complaint disappear but the poems would be far more objective. That he could do this is demonstrated by what he has done; that he wants to do it is either obvious, or I am wrong entirely about what I feel as his sense of his profession: which for the practitioner must be above all the obligation of craft.

R. P. BLACKMUR

POEMS. *By Louis MacNeice. Random House.* $2.50.

Louis MacNeice is an exact contemporary of Auden's, but at thirty has been far less prolific. He offers now a collection which retains only four poems from his first volume, *Blind Fireworks,* 1929, and adds to his volume of 1935 about fifteen poems more. He showed his Irish sense of humor in choosing the title for his early poems "because they are artificial and yet random; because they go quickly through their antics against an important background, and fall and go out quickly." The short musical exercises that he has decided to keep from these pieces possess what Eliot, in talking about Blake, recognized as the more likely kind of promise; instead of crude efforts to encompass something grandiose they are "quite mature and successful attempts to do something small." The distance he travelled between the less distinct remainder of that volume and the *Poems* of 1935 is considerable. In the two years preceding his second book he developed a distinguishing style, a rhythm unmistakably his own. He seems to have profited most from Hopkins in learning how to give to the conventional line a more resilient conversational tone. But his feeling that Hopkins was wrong to bind his sprung rhythm to the arbitrary frame of an equal number of accented syllables for every line has enabled MacNeice to gain a greater fluency, and a very deft approximation to an actual speaking voice.

Although he was at Oxford at the same time as the group of young English poets who have hitherto been more widely discussed, MacNeice's course has been fairly independent of theirs. His is not "fighting" poetry. His impulse has not been contentious and hortatory like Auden's; he has not joined Spender in romantic proclamations of faith. He has recently

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remarked: "Poets are not legislators (what is an 'unacknowledged legislator' anyway?), but they put facts and feelings in italics, which make people think about them and such thinking may in the end have an outcome in action." Such an attitude may seem too passive for much contemporary taste; and it has not brought into poetry the wide subject matter of economics and science which Auden's unflagging curiosity has explored, nor the more mechanically manipulated culverts and pistons and other modern properties of Day Lewis. In "Turf-Stacks," written in 1932, MacNeice formulated his lack of political position:

For we are obsolete who like the lesser things
Who play in corners with looking-glasses and beads;
It is better we should go quickly, go into Asia
Or any other tunnel where the world recedes,
Or turn blind wantons like the gulls who scream
And rip the edge off any ideal or dream.

But he has not embraced either of the alternatives offered in that stanza, though ironically bitter contemplation of his own country has brought him closer to the last one. He has never made of poetry an easy vehicle for evasion, for although he has a warm feeling for landscape, he knows that he always carries a city-bred mind with him. He has, however, set himself fairly deliberately to writing descriptive poetry, as when he states in "Train to Dublin":

I give you the incidental things which pass
Outwards through space exactly as each was.

He knows that this demands an exacting discipline. Unlike most other poets who have been influenced by Eliot he has learned and declared that "You must walk before you can dance; you can't be a master of suggestion unless you are a master of description." He has consequently evolved the neat craft of making the inner coherence of a poem depend on the subtle and precise interrelationships of a series of things observed. But success in this kind requires tight-rope technique, for if any image asserts itself too vividly, the balance is quickly upset, and the whole effect falls into obtrusive fragments.

Nor is it conceivable that a poet could describe anything exactly as it was without betraying some point of view towards his material. MacNeice's frequent fascination with catching the effects of sunlight and smoke suggests that he has the eyes of a painter, but his interest is never confined merely to recording surface textures. In some passages he may reveal that

. . . there is beauty narcotic and deciduous

in the very midst of the sinister chaos of a modern city. But though his subject matter is seldom political, he is increasingly aware of the social implications of what he sees. He quoted last fall: " 'Other philosophies have described the world; our business is to change it.' Add that if we are not interested in changing it, there is really very little to describe." And the close of "Eclogue from Iceland," 1936, to which he travelled with Auden, finds him in a much more positive mood than that of the

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young Irish intellectual who, in "Valediction," had two years previously turned away from his own country in the manner traditional to "The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man." For in the "Eclogue" the ghost of Grettir tells the two summer visitors that they had better go back to where they had come from, and that in spite of the enormous odds against their being able to make anything prevail:

Minute your gesture but it must be made—
Your hazard, your act of defiance and hymn of hate,
Hatred of hatred, assertion of human values,
Which is now your only duty . . .
Yes, my friends, it is your only duty.
And, it may be added, it is your only chance.

Notwithstanding the dramatic tension here, MacNeice's talent so far seems fundamentally lyrical. In saying that I bear in mind that he has already published a translation of the *Agamemnon* and a two-act play of his own, *Out of the Picture*. But whereas the translation displays a firm controlled simplicity that recreates much of the original passion, his own play is the one occasion where MacNeice seems to have collapsed into being affected by the least valuable elements in Auden, and has produced a loosely blurred mixture where it is hard to say whether the intention is satire or farce, since nothing comes through clear. Moreover, in his poems, MacNeice's continual subject is Time, conceived wholly in the lyric mode of dwelling on the moment's evanescence, as when he advises a Communist that before he proclaims the millenium, he had better regard the barometer—

This poise is perfect but maintained
For one day only.

Both his mind and imagery are so possessed with this theme that he finally tries to shake off his preoccupation by affirming that he does not want always to be stressing either flux or permanence, that he does not want to be either "a tragic or a philosophic chorus," but to keep his eye "only on the nearer future." From the stuff of that "nearer future" he makes his most balanced and proportioned poems.

In an ode for his son, which owes something to Yeats' "A Prayer for my Daughter," he would ward off from him the desire for any absolute "which is too greedy and too obvious." MacNeice cannot accept the "easy bravery" of being "drugged with a slogan," and can hand on to his son neither decalogue nor formula but only symbols, and those only so far as he can feel them emerge from close and concrete samples of experience. Most of all he would pray:

let him not falsify the world
By taking it to pieces;
The marriage of Cause and Effect, Form and Content,
Let him not part asunder.

The desire for such fusion has found fulfillment in the architectural structure of many of his longer poems, and it is the chief evidence for MacNeice's skill as an artist that his clearest successes are in their com-

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plex harmonies rather than in his simpler short pieces. In "Homage to Clichées," for instance, he has devised and developed a series of repeated images to celebrate his delight in the familiar: the expected response of his companion is elicited as though by stroking a cat, or is angled from the stream of their conversation as the fish swim into the net and the drinks swim over the bar. Here his observations intermesh so intricately that even though you can take surprised delight in a single example:

> *. . . an old man momentously sharpens a pencil as though*
> *He were not merely licking his fur like a cat,*

it becomes the best tribute to the unity which the poet has created that no adequate illustration is possible short of the entire poem. For here his attitude is less bald than in the somewhat stagey declaration in his "Epilogue" that he drinks Auden's health before "the gun-butt raps upon the door." For, in "Homage to Clichées," the perishable stuff of the everyday life which he relishes is embodied with such warm resilience that the undertone of the menacing future which he expects reverberates far more movingly than it would by means of any bare direct statement.

Where his dependence on oblique and symbolic images can fail him is when they are not reinforced by sufficiently mature experience. This is the trouble with the pictures of contemporary man and woman near the end of the "Eclogue from Iceland." The details by which they are presented do not bite deeply enough into actuality, they are too private and trivial. The fact that this can be the case in one of MacNeice's latest poems will be disturbing to those readers who believe that the artist must progress and offer with each new year a better-appointed model. But, despite the clarification and firming of his social attitude, it cannot be said that MacNeice's graph has gone continually upward. He seems to have remained on about the same level from the time that he hit his individual stride five years ago, and he may not yet have written a solider poem than the sardonic conversation between a city-dweller and a country-dweller, "An Eclogue for Christmas," in 1933. It must also be added that in spite of his realization, on the Iceland trip, that further travel could be productive only of more souvenirs and "copy," 1937 found him, not following Grettir's advice, but in the Hebrides, evolving another detached and sensitive descriptive poem about those islands.

It is undoubtedly true that MacNeice's conversational style is less socially useful to the needs of our day than the public speech that may be developed from Auden's exciting rhetoric. Nor does MacNeice possess the exuberance and inventiveness which Herbert Read believes Auden to have brought back into English poetry for the first time since Browning's death. On the other hand, MacNeice's richest resource is suggested in a curious remark which he made about Day Lewis, that he is an inferior poet to Auden "perhaps because his vision is purer and more consistent." He recognizes that Lewis, though doctrinally correct, can fall into both priggishness and diffuseness by his humorless preaching

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for the cause. MacNeice's own awareness that life "is incorrigibly plural," his deeper immersion in its complexities, his more unchecked reliance on the evidence of his senses, at times result in a vague softness. He does not have anything like the extraordinary range of technical dexterity with which Auden seemingly can take up or burlesque almost any kind of tradition from Skelton to Tennyson and Kipling. But MacNeice's control is far more matured, he rarely indulges in thin *tours de force* or slipshod virtuosity. And if the measurement is not by "promise," by brilliant passages standing out from obscurity, but by whole poems, which can be tested line for line and re-read with accruing satisfaction, MacNeice's performance so far is ahead of that of his contemporaries.

F. O. MATTHIESSEN

RISPOSTES

Is Naturalism Exhausted?

Writing about the contemporary short story in the winter number of *The Southern Review,* Mr. Howard Baker has made explicit, in terms of an assault on naturalism, some of the dissatisfaction with the current state of American fiction which has of late been stirring the critical air. It was to be expected that this dissatisfaction should take the shape of a revolt against the sway of the naturalist method. Manifestly the revival of some form of symbolism (or its extension into some new form) is burgeoning in the younger generation. In this connection one hears the name of Franz Kafka pronounced with awe in various circles as a possible source of fresh inspiration. And, in truth, more than any other European writer who has recently come to the attention of Americans, Kafka suggests the rich potentialities of the fable and of symbolic conceptions. Mr. Baker likewise professes to see the genius of Kafka contending with the benighted naturalists; and among the signs and portents of new departures in prose he lists the short stories of Eleanor Clark and Delmore Schwartz. To Mr. Baker's sparse list one might add other items of recent date that tend to confirm this change of literary purpose. In their essay, "Literature in a Political Decade" (*New Letters in America*), William Phillips and Philip Rahv excoriated the perennial devices that American fiction adopts as substitutes for consciousness and imagination. In the PARTISAN REVIEW for December, 1937, William Troy, reviewing a reissue of *Germinal* under the significant title "The Symbolism of Zola," attempted the difficult feat of rescuing the father of naturalism from the engulfing sands of his own system. And not long ago the *New Masses* opened its pages to a controversy—occasioned by Granville Hicks' alarm over the inroads that pessimism is making among the youger writers—which showed that in that camp too the virus of anti-natural-

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ism has infected some of the more critical spirits.

In this period, when the blight of political meddling in behalf of narrow party interests makes so much thinking about literature insincere and superficial, it is good to see vital *literary* differences again coming into the open. But do the sins of naturalism really offer a sufficient explanation of the failures of present-day writing? Naturalism needs to be put on the defensive, but it seems to us that the attack on it, essentially healthy insofar as it promises a renewal of the creative impulse, has not transcended the formalist approach to the problem. It is not primarily a matter of placing any one method of representing experience on the expurgatory index. Compared to most American practitioners of naturalism, Zola was surely a titan of literary art; and a work as powerful as *Studs Lonigan* points once more to the dangers inherent in a fetishistic attitude to any given creative method, whether through this attitude we negate or affirm it. Variety, curiosity, and amplitude of means—all these are lacking in the American novel as now written. Its imagination lurks in ambush instead of walking in the broad light of day, and its moral and intellectual sensibilities have neither grown singly nor have they intertwined into a net to catch those monstrous modern presences that swim in the American deeps. Patently what is at fault here weighs heavier in the scale of determinism than a possibly mistaken or inadequate method of resolving material and fashioning it for creative uses.

Provisionally, we tend to agree with Mr. Baker that "the back of naturalism is being broken in many different ways" and that "a critical, intellectually organized" point of view on the part of the novelist or short story writer requires a less primitive mode of presentation. Also, we were particularly interested in his statement that naturalism "seems to have become the particular heritage of the Marxists." Before any such vague opinions, however, can assume the dimensions of a critical position it becomes necessary to analyze in some detail the social and cultural conditions that make for a rise and decline of naturalism. There are ample data for such an analysis; but so far more questions have been raised than answered. The term itself strikes us as too loose to describe with any degree of exactness the diverse works cited as examples of naturalist formlessness and indifference to values. In fact, the whole subject, with its many ramifications, ought to be done full justice in a longer and more elaborate discussion. We promise the readers of PARTISAN REVIEW such a piece in an early issue.

Politics and Partisan Review

We might have guessed that the *Socialist Appeal*, organ of the Trotskyists, would criticize our editorial policy, challenge our concept of independence, and charge us with ignoring the claims of practical politics. We could not have foreseen, however, that our gentle contemporary, *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*, would come forward to quizz us on the same score. Both publications seem well-disposed towards PARTISAN REVIEW in general; yet both of them, reviewing the editorial statement in our December issue, ask substantially the same question: Is It Revolutionary?

Poetry pays its respects to our literary content, then editorializes as follows:

Formerly associated with the Communist Party, this magazine now pledges itself to fighting "the party-line in literature." Though some of the contributors are adherents of Trotsky, there is no evidence that the review is an organ of Trotskyism as its opponents charge; nor is there anything to indicate a sectarian bias in the plainly mugwump attitude of the opening editorial. The question arises, however, whether a magazine professedly revolutionary in character can avoid having some definite political program, either explicit or implied. Taken at its face value, the policy of the PARTISAN REVIEW *seems to boil down to this: that literature, for the present, should lead not to action but to more literature. That may or may not be an ex-*

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cellent policy. But is it revolutionary?

We answer *Poetry* as follows: our program is the program of Marxism, which in general terms means being for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society, for a workers government, and for international socialism. In contemporary terms it implies the struggle against capitalism in all its modern guises and disguises, including bourgeois democracy, fascism, and reformism (social democracy, Stalinism). As for the rôle of literature in the revolutionary process, we are frankly skeptical of the old imperatives. Novels and poems, we think, are rarely weapons in the class struggle in a sense direct enough to justify the phrase. Marxism is a guide to action, certainly; and Marxism can be a guide to literature, but whether literature itself is, can be, or should be, typically a guide to action is one of the problems that PARTISAN REVIEW is dedicated to explore. For the rest, a literature which "led to action" without at the same time leading "to more literature," would not, we are convinced, be literature at all.

The *Socialist Appeal* regards our break with Stalinism as the most significant fact about PARTISAN REVIEW. We are a sign of the times, of "a revolt against Stalinism among the intellectuals." They concentrate on the political implications of Ripostes and the editorial, and they ignore completely the 70-odd pages of literary material between the two departments. Approving our rejection of the Stalinist practice of equating literature with factional politics, they nevertheless charge us with having "swung over to the opposite extreme." In their opinion, we "propose to remain independent, i.e. neutral and indifferent, not towards politics in general, but only towards the revolutionary politics of the labor movement." A few more paragraphs and we are "culpable of ignoring, and thus denying in practice, the close bond" between literature and politics. And finally we are charged with holding a "conception of its (literature's) absolute independence." So the *Appeal*, by equating independence with indifference, lands us in pure estheticism. All because we have failed editorially to decide which "among the tendencies struggling for supremacy within the ranks of the American working class most clearly and consistently fights for the ideas, interests, and aims of Socialism and most faithfully carries on the best traditions of Marxism? Which must be considered the vanguard of the revolutionary movement?"

Let a poet who is also a member of the Trotskyist organization correct their over-zealous simplifications and answer their ultimatist demands. The following is a letter addressed to the *Appeal* by John Wheelwright, who sent us a copy. So far the *Appeal* has failed to publish it.

To the Editors of the
Socialist Appeal:

On December 4 you devoted nearly a page to the PARTISAN REVIEW. "We salute," you began, but your salute turned into a thumbnose. If your intention be to win the Partisans over, your lack of tact is in sad contrast to the *Partisan's* handling of Stalinist centrism in its review of Horace Gregory's anthology, *New Letters*.

Your review shows no knowledge of more than the first 4 and the last 3 pages of the magazine, and you must merely have skimmed through these, for your say that the Editor blames the *New Yorker* for being petty-bourgeois, while as a matter of fact, it is the *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker* which he thus accurately characterizes. But where he is mistaken, you do not correct him.

"Marxism in culture," he says, "is first of all an instrument of analysis and evaluation; and if in the last instance it prevails over other disciplines, it does so through the medium of democratic controversy." This falls short of a revolutionary view of letters. Marxism is, first, a guide to act. It prevails over other cultural disciplines because its aid is indispensable to the creative imagination. Reciprocally, the creative imagination guides political action. Such simple corollaries could have got your reviewer through the body of the magazine.

Abel on Silone and Wilson on

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Flaubert discuss problems of authority which press brutally upon us. No one in the labor world would profit more from considering them than your reviewer. His thorough negligence implicates our Party not only in a breach of literary manners, but as well in a violation of professional morals.

Matters even more serious are at stake. This review is unsigned. It therefore carries the formal weight of an *Appeal* editorial. But it does not speak for Left Socialism.

The PARTISAN REVIEW has been founded to fight the tendency to confuse literature and party politics. The mere rumor of so independent an attitude brought forth (to the delight of nations) such *Daily Worker* fits of anti-Trotskyism which to describe would involve the use of a lexicon of mental pathology. Your editorial pointed out the political weakness of the *Partisan's* un-Trotskyist retort. But your intricate distortion of its intention is that the Review proposes to "remain neutral and indifferent only towards the labor movement and independent of revolutionary Marxist politics with toplofty indifference and alienation turning their backs upon political questions,"—just what the *Daily Worker* with its limited vocabulary was trying to say: "slanderers of the working class, turncoats, agents provocateurs, strikebreakers."

This identity with the *Daily Worker's* view towards conscientious persons whom they cannot control is far from accidental. Your view is that "According to the correct Marxist position, there need be no discord between revolutionary politics" (our National Office) "and revolutionary literature" (the PARTISAN REVIEW'S office). "All depends upon establishing a correct working relationship between them and their organizational expressions." With Stalinism's history behind us, no one can be surprised when this so correct threat gives way to meaching plea: "It will be easy enough to find fruitful conditions for collaboration. A revolutionary organ should be open to the best productions of living literature, regardless of the special political views of their authors"!!!

Once a Trotskyist watchdog is kenneled in the *Partisan's* office desk, the doors of literature open upon vista after vista of opportunism. In all conscience, this is something worse than literary Stalinism has yet got at. Contrariwise, the PARTISAN REVIEW pays regard to the politics of its authors in order to open up the best of contemporary literature, and, even without the collaboration of our political organizers, to bring proletarian politics to a Marxist position.

Graciously, you concede "complete autonomy for the workers in the arts and sciences within their own fields." What are these cut and dried categories? Who charts these realms as Pope Paul divided the terrestrial globe between Spain and Portugal? Who is being toplofty now? You say, "Politics dominates everything in our world, including literature." This is an error which Bonaparte phrased better: Politics is the modern destiny. William Blake said: Art does not follow empire. Empire follows art. Scientific Socialism finds Blake and Bonaparte equally at fault in special pleading. Mode of production underlies all culture; literature and politics respond autonomously; each retarded, each advanced by the other.

But you, with high authoritarianism, declare it necessary for a literary circumference to have a political center from which all the rest logically radiates. O, formal pundit! The PARTISAN REVIEW will get a superlogical center empirically by methods of objective test, finding chords and diameters of the circles, spheres and spirals of a reality beyond yours. It must do so without a political center if yours prove unfit.

The brain behind the hand that wrote your editorial is the brain behind the tongue which would with *proletarian vs. intellectual* demagogy transform Trotskyism into a Stalinesque international slum.

JOHN WHEELWRIGHT

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Mass Criticism

In its issue of January 12, the *New Republic* prints a round-robin letter signed by fifteen people from East St. Louis, Ill., which makes a personal and scurrilous attack on the literary reputation of James T. Farrell. Such an attack, when made by an individual, might, of course, be a spontaneous expression of his literary taste. But a letter of this kind, signed by a large group of people, takes on the aspect of an organized campaign of vilification. Regardless of the merit of Mr. Farrell's work—and we do not agree with the East St. Louis camarilla—we deplore the publication of such a letter. Unless the *New Republic* is sponsoring a new form of mass literary criticism, it seems to us unfair to select one writer for this type of "special attention."

Letters in Brief

Babette Deutsch writes (New York City): "It has been a pleasure to read the first two issues, both for the interest of the contents and the admirable character of the policy." . . . From Ezra Pound (Rapallo, Italy) a query: "Marxism, ameliorated or sunk?" Our reply: "Ezra, come home: all is forgiven." . . . R. P. Blackmur (Boston) and Leonard Brown (Syracuse) protest the review of Kenneth Burke's *Attitudes Towards History* in our December issue. Mr. Blackmur finds it "irrelevant to what the book actually contains." Mr. Brown calls it a "marvellous study in feints." David Haskell (Brooklyn) feels, on the contrary, that Mr. Hook took Mr. Burke "*too* seriously." . . . Nathan Asch reminds us that in his letter to us, printed in our January issue, he wrote: "Except for the Farrell piece, I think the first issue is swell." . . . Richard Eberhart (Southboro, Mass.) liked James Agee's "Lyrics" in the December issue. ". . . he is the only U. S. poet his age who knows much about music—something a good many of the rest of them could study to advantage." . . . Z. Zacharia (Mt. Vernon, N. Y.) asks: "Are you sure you are not pro-Hitler?" and cancels his subscription. . . . Another cancellation from Betty Hudson (Winnepeg). "Take your magazine back to the underworld where it belongs." she writes. . . . From William Pillin (Santa Fe): "I want to say that the first two issues of PARTISAN REVIEW are the best two issues of a revolutionary magazine I have ever seen." And David C. DeJong (Providence) finds the magazine "far above expectations, which were fond enough." . . . From George Marion O'Donnell (Belzoni, Miss.): "I approve wholeheartedly of the fight you are making against those who would make literature the *ancilla ecclesiae* to some of the contemporary political religions." . . . Saul Shapiro (Montreal) approves of everything but the proof-reading and the art section. Of the latter he writes: "I would recommend something less aesthetic and more to the general taste. A few good lively cartoons, shall we say, that pack a real social punch." . . . Dorothy Dudley (New York City) likes "the tone of the magazine which is creative and aesthetic." . . . From James Laughlin, IV (editor, *New Directions,* Norfolk, Conn.): "I want to tell you that I think the two issues of PARTISAN REVIEW have made it the best magazine now being published. I hope you can keep it like that." . . . From Sydney J. Harris (editor *The Beacon,* Chicago) a warning: "I should guard against being too esoteric, if I may venture the suggestion. Most periodicals of your type end up with readers consisting solely of the editors' relatives. I hope that PARTISAN REVIEW won't meet this fate."

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